Daryl Hawk's Timeless Journey through Incredible India

Picture Courtesy - Daryl Hawk

(By Bidisha Roy) He is a renowned professional photographer, writer, filmmaker who spent almost a decade planning for his dream destination in India - a 300 mile journey from Leh to Ladakh. Finally Daryl Hawk's dream became a reality in early 2014 when he spent three weeks in Leh-Ladakh traveling through some of the roughest terrain in India and constantly recording his experiences and photographing the mesmeric journey - from quaint hidden monasteries, to interviewing the King of Ladakh, to camping on the mountain-side without any heating, and attempting to spot a snow-leopard. Daryl Hawk shared his unrestricted and unique experience with The Insider.

The Insider: Why did you decide to travel from Leh to Ladakh?

My main goal to travel to Ladakh was to do one of the most indepth and comprehensive photo documentaries ever done on this little known region in Kashmir. I like to shine a light on the most remote areas in the world and show the importance and urgency to protect the last wild places on earth as well as the indigenous cultures that inhabit these places. It was also very exciting to do a complete traverse from the Pakistan border to the Tibetan border while crossing the highest motorable pass in the world, the Khardung-La Pass at 18,380 feet.

The Insider: How was your experience?

My experience could not have been more positive in every aspect. The solitude, beautiful landscapes, wonderful people, continuous adventures, enlightening spiritual experiences, amazing body of photographs all added up to success.

The Insider: How photogenic is India?

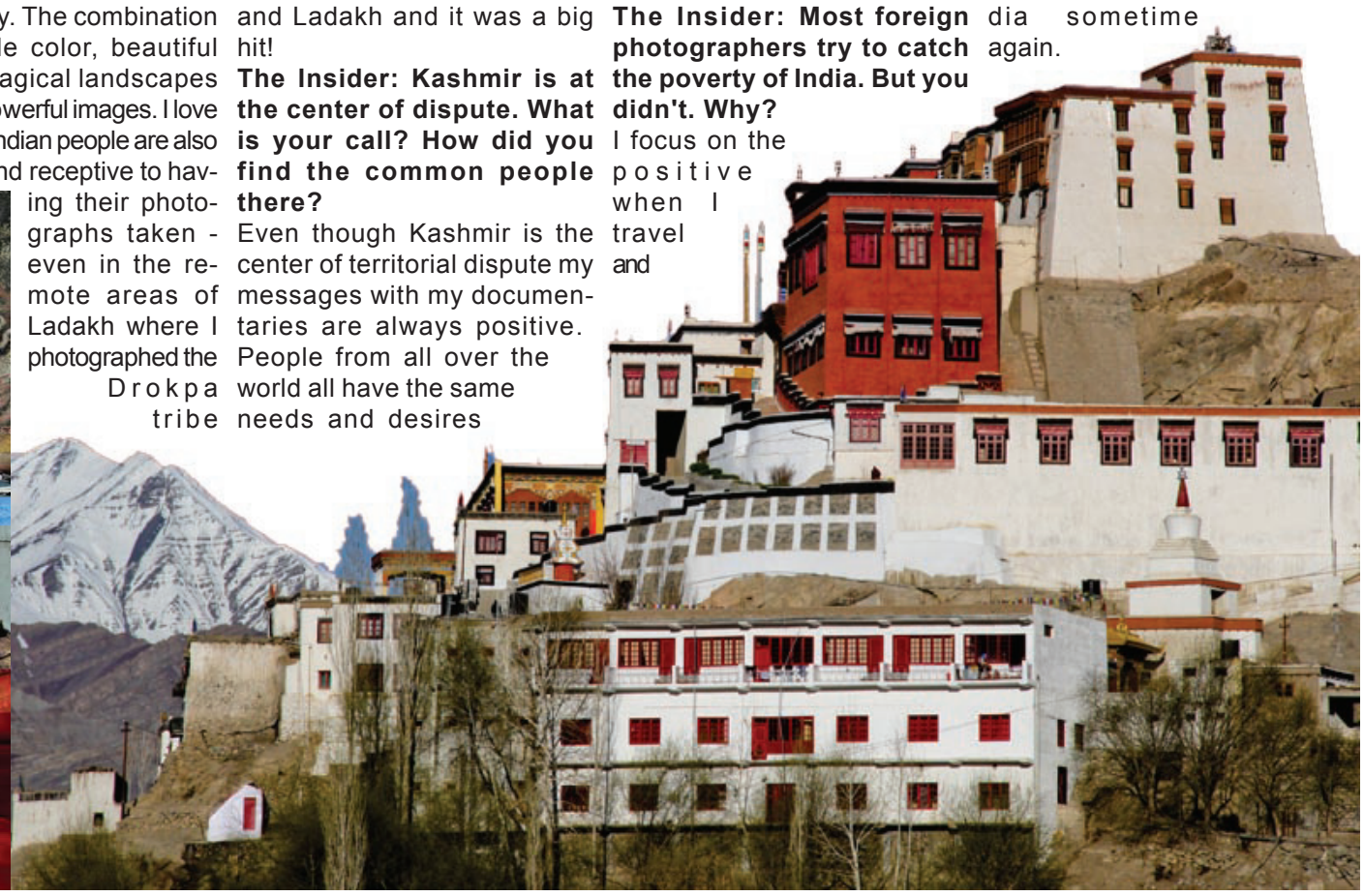
One of the reasons I also decided to go to Rajasthan and Agra to see the TajMahal is because all of my life I had heard how India is one of the best countries in the world for photography. The combination of incredible color, beautiful light with magical landscapes add up to powerful images. I love the fact that Indian people are also very open and receptive to having their photographs taken - even in the remote areas of Ladakh where I photographed the Drokpa tribe near Pakistan and the Tibetan nomads on the Chinese border. I don't think I was refused a photograph by anyone the entire month that I was there! My overall experience in India was all positive. Traveling alone I felt very safe and families and individuals befriended me wherever I went. I handed out American sporting cards to all of the children that I met along the way in Rajasthan, Agra, New Delhi and Ladakh and it was a big hit!

The Insider: Kashmir is at the center of dispute. What is your call? How did you find the common people there?

Even though Kashmir is the center of territorial dispute my messages with my documentaries are always positive. People from all over the world all have the same needs and desires and as long as you travel with a smile on your face and are respectful of their culture you will be greeted with open arms. I found this to be true everywhere I traveled in India. I do not get involved in politics when I travel. My main goal is to shoot an indepth documentary and show people around the world what these places look like and how I see the ordinary as extraordinary.

The Insider: Most foreign photographers try to catch the poverty of India. But you didn't. Why?

I focus on the positive when I travel and choose not to try to document the negative. I also just see the beauty around me and try to concentrate on the common bond that all of humanity shares.

The Insider: Would you like to visit India again?

Even though I have a long list of places to still see and photograph, including Yunnan in China next April, I have a feeling that I will return to India sometime again.