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Hamad Darwish

[Meet Hamad Darwish - Windows Vista Photographer](#)

Interview

As I have promised a while back, here is the interview with Hamad Darwish, one of the photographers commissioned by Microsoft for a Windows Vista wallpaper photoshoot. I would like to thank Hamad for the time he has taken to share his Vista experience with us. You will be able to download a set of Vista wallpapers Hamad has made available via this link on his personal [website](#), and also access his other works [here](#) on Flickr. That being said, I will let you read the interview. Enjoy!

1. Could you please give us some details, something about yourself? An introduction on one of the contributors to Windows Vista, for our readers. I am a 24 years old Kuwait Radiographer / Network Administrator. I am a photography hobbyist, and an adventure enthusiast. I was born and raised in Kuwait. In the year 2000, and at the age of 17 I moved to the United States to acquire my Bachelor's degree in Radiological Sciences and Medical Imaging from Oregon Institute of Technology in Klamath Falls, Oregon. In spring 2006, I finished my education and moved back to Kuwait with my family. I currently live and work in Kuwait for the Ministry of Health at a local hospital specialized for heart and chest diseases. This may sound a bit awkward, but I'm also a hardcore gamer. I can't live without my video games. I build my own gaming PCs, and I also own the two major next-gen consoles.

2. And because we are on the subject... are you a Windows user? How did you manage to fit Vista into your work with photography? Sure I am. I've been using Windows since version 3.11 and never thought about switching. Windows is a platform that hosts everything I ever needed (Note: I'm not getting paid to say this :). There are great little features integrated into Windows Vista that make working with photos and managing imaging libraries much simpler than before. I can now tag my images and view critical meta-data information right on the spot. I can rate images, and view them using several methods and share them very conveniently. For someone like me, who's got several hard-drives and hundreds of gigs worth of RAW files and photographs, even the simplest of the new features make all the difference.

3. Before we get to your work for Microsoft, what is your background in photography? If you could credit a person, event, philosophy, belief etc. for your talent, what would that be? All that I know about photography came from two sources, practice, and reading. I've owned my current and also my first SLR for less than 3 years now and pretty much most of my work has been taken with it. Although I haven't really been using a camera for long, I've been around cameras all my life. My dad is also a photography hobbyist, and I spent most of my childhood watching him carry his camera everywhere, and driving around the countryside photographing birds and wildlife. So if I were to credit anyone for my passion for photography, it has to be my father.

4. Please tell us a little something about your collaboration with Microsoft. I was commissioned by the Microsoft Corporation for a photoshoot to create images to be used for Windows Vista's desktop wallpaper collection.

5. What exactly have you done for the Redmond Company, and where will Vista users be able to see your work? I submitted to Microsoft 15 photographs of which they chose to purchase 5. Windows Vista users will be able to use two of these images for their desktop wallpaper. Two of my images are featured in the Vista collection. Both images are listed under "Vistas", while one of the images is also featured under the "wide-screen" collection as well.

6. Could you summarize the Windows Vista project, and deliver some details as to the locations visited, the time you have dedicated, the amount of work and the result? During my last year in the United States, I was approached by the Microsoft Corporation because they were interested in purchasing some of my work to be featured in the Desktop Wallpaper collection in Microsoft's newest addition to the Windows family of

products, Windows Vista. Initially, I received an email stating that an unknown source is interested in buying some of my photographs. When I replied with approval, I received an official letter from Microsoft in that regard. As soon as I saw the Microsoft Logo in the letter's header, I wasn't sure how to react. After a short period of negotiation, they decided to hire me for a photoshoot. My assignment was to create genuine images to be part of the Windows Vista desktop wallpaper collection. I was hired to deliver 15 images, and Microsoft would then pick 5 images to purchase. I was given complete freedom of choice of where and what to photograph; however, there were strict criteria provided by Microsoft in regard to colors, and spacing of the elements within the image. At that time, I was working in Rogue Valley Medical Center in Medford, Oregon, and to do the photoshoot I had to ask for some time off. After closely examining weather conditions within different regions of the State of Oregon, I rented a decent 4x4 vehicle, and took two-weeks vacation. I started photographing from the Southern Oregon coast, and followed the coast north on highway 101 until I reached the coastal city of Bandon. I spent 4 days along the coast and then decided to head in-land. I followed the Rogue River heading south for 2 days and then went back to my home. I rested for a day and looked at what I got from the 6 days I spent traveling. I then started to go to some locations that are close by like Mt. Ashland, the Table Rocks, and also the Recreation area of Joseph Stewart in Prospect, Oregon. In total, I spent about 10 days on shooting, producing close to 6000 RAW digital images. It then took me about 14 days to select the 15 photographs I wanted to submit to Microsoft. At the very end of an intensive selection process by me and Microsoft, they picked the 5 images they wanted to purchase, and two of which are now featured in Windows Vista's desktop wallpaper collection. It is worth to note that I was the only non-American photographer that Microsoft commissioned for this project, and I am the one that has more than 1 image featured in Windows Vista.

7. How has your collaboration with Microsoft impacted your life? Do you plan to pursue photography as a full time job? It is quite hard to describe the full extent of the impact. The amount of exposure this deal has offered me is beyond imagination. When I was approached by Microsoft, I was only a foreign student, studying in the United States and taking pictures for fun. Now there are millions of people from all over the world that are quite familiar with my name and my humble work. Full time job! probably not. My work in the field of health care brings me a great deal of happiness and self-satisfaction. On the other hand, photography to me, at this point, is just a way to escape the daily routine and get outside my house to do something different. I can not quit my job because I like it a lot, and because I spent so many years away from family to gain my degree. I am not willing to give all of that away. I am also not willing to pursue photography as a career because I do not want to lose all the benefits of having it as a hobby, something I do because I want to, not because I have to.

8. The Windows operating system is running on approximately 95% of the world's machines. As Windows Vista will have a larger and larger share of that percentage, how does it feel to be a part of that? It feels great. Actually, I am not sure yet how it feels. Since I was first contacted by Microsoft, I always knew how big the exposure was going to be, but honestly, I never realized it, until Vista hit the market. I'm currently living what I could consider the greatest period of my life.

9. What are your "tools of the trade?" What kind of equipment did you use to capture the images for the Microsoft photoshoot? My equipment is actually quite simple. I don't have any high-end gear. I use a Canon 20D 8.2MP digital SLR and I own a decent set of lenses that I have acquired throughout the years. Most of my lenses are wide-angle and standard-zoom lenses so they are mainly suitable for capturing nature and landscapes. To enhance colors, and make images pop-out, I utilize many photographic filters like circular-polarizers, neutral density, and graduated colors.

10. Once you have finished capturing the images, what next? How does Photoshop integrate into your workflow? Photoshop is an essential tool in my work-flow. I capture images using RAW format, so the first step in my digital work-flow is to convert my RAW image into a jpeg. I usually do that using Canon's Digital Photo Professional. Once the conversion process is

finished, I use photoshop to fine tune the images. I almost always adjust images for levels and contrast, and in some cases I boost the saturation slightly. I also use photoshop every time I decide to convert an image to monochrome.

11. What is your favorite photo out of the Windows Vista photoshoot? Although I am quite pleased with how most of the images turned out, I think my favorite image would be [Destination vol. II](#). Unfortunately, it didn't make it into Vista.

12. Could you reveal to our readers the story of one of the photos from the minute you decided on the shot to the one you clicked save for the last time? I think the most exciting image to shoot for me was ["Explore the Romance"](#). I was walking along the shoreline at Harris Beach state park in Brookings, Oregon, when I noticed some rock formation that extended quite far into the water. I decided to climb those rocks and take a shot looking along the entire coast. It was approaching sunset time and the light temperature, and weather conditions were perfect. I found the spot I was looking for and I placed my tripod. I hooked up the appropriate lens and hooked up my Cokin filter holder on the lens's front. I decided to use a relatively long exposure to utilize the most of the waves. I inserted a neutral density filter with a sunset enhancing filter. I dialed the right exposure and held my cable release. Right before pressing the exposure button an old man... walked right into my scene. When I looked through my view-finder it was perfect. The old man adding a lovely sense of scale and exploration to the image and I thought it was just what I was missing 10 seconds before. I waited for him to stop moving and I pressed the button. The exposure was 5 seconds long, and luckily, the old man stood still. When I went back to my hotel that evening, I opened my RAW image and corrected the White-balance and contrast. I then converted the image to a jpeg and opened it in photoshop where I adjusted the level and desaturated the image slightly.

13. How would you connect the dots between these words digital... art... photography? The digital world has created new art fields, has also eased the entry to existing fields of art such as photography. It is now a lot simpler to people to get into photography and try it out. In terms of digital art vs photography, I think the difference is very thin and people can make the jump between the two unnoticeably. I think digital technology is fantastic, and can be utilized to improve the field of photography in so many ways; however, photographers should be careful.

14. They say that one picture is worth a thousand words. What are the 5 images selected by Microsoft worth to you? And what were they worth to Microsoft? To me, the 5 images symbolize the start of my wide recognition as a photographer. I never dreamed of anything like this. Although I'm not thinking of pursuing photography as a career, that doesn't mean I don't like to see my work being recognized and admired by others. These 5 images will always be the turning point. To Microsoft, I think it is the start of involving the Windows community in shaping the user experience. I'm not sure Microsoft have done something similar to this in the past. To me it doesn't sound like they did, which makes things even greater from my own point of view. To be among the very first people of the Windows community to be involved in such a project is just fantastic. Those 5 images might be worth more or less to Microsoft. Only they have the answer.