

TENAYA LODGE Yosemite Park and Hyundai's Santa Fe

by Lyndon Bell

A quietly cool combo

Silence. Deep, brooding, introspective silence. Legendary saxophonist John Coltrane once said that he did most of his writing at 3 a.m., because that was when the world was its most serene.

At that time, he said, the world was so peaceful, he could hear the music swirling around inside his brain.

Had he ever visited the Yosemite Valley where, in winter, the stillness enfolds you, he would have written all day. The tourists long gone, you're free to contemplate the majestic beauty around you at your very own pace.

This tranquility, resplendent in its seasonal garment of snow, can spark some powerfully spiritual, transcendent moments.

Just pondering the creation of such a glorious place gives one pause, particularly given its scale. Consider for a moment Yosemite Falls. At 2,425 feet, it is just under a half mile high, making it North America's tallest waterfall. Immediately across the valley floor is Bridal Veil Falls, as towering as a 62-story building. Indeed, there is no other place on earth where two cataracts of such magnitude reside so close together. Then there are those spectacular granite formations — El Capitan, Sentinel Rock and, of course Yosemite's icon, Half Dome, which alone climbs to 8,842 feet.

Combined, they reach more than one mile into the sky. It is truly a spectacle to behold.

Winter visits feel particularly significant, for it was snow and ice that created the valley's wonders. Until about 10,000 years ago, the Yosemite Valley was buried underneath a glacier. Those glacial movements eventually sculpted intricate granite formations, producing some of the most captivating waterfalls on the planet. By any measure, the ages it took to spawn these wonders was certainly worth the wait.

Our mount for this adventure was Hyundai's very capable Santa Fe sport-utility vehi-



cle. Overall, it handled rather nicely. I was particularly impressed by the way it comported itself during one of the area's biggest snowstorms in some time. New for 2001, our Santa Fe was equipped with all-wheel-drive and a 181-horsepower V6. Though there were six inches of ice between our tires and the pavement, the Santa Fe never once spun its wheels. There were quibbles, though. For instance, being 6-feet tall, I could have used a bit more legroom. It would have been nice, too, if our model had the optional heated seats. Heated exterior mirrors aren't even an option. But considering our LX model's base price of \$22,494, including destination charge, it's pretty well equipped.

Anyway, we parked our Santa Fe, Hyundai's "sport-cute" offering, at Tenaya Camp, in California near the southern entrance of Yosemite National Park.

Tenaya Camp is a family-friendly, AAA, four-diamond hotel, with its comfortable rustic decor and grand, roaring fireplace in the lobby, (hey, we were roughing it in style).

A bit of trivia: some of the first rangers to oversee the park were African Americans. As early as 1899, the Buffalo Soldiers of the Sierra Nevada traveled to Yosemite from California garrisons on a route first laid down in 1891.

In fact, park ranger and naturalist Shelton Johnson is leading a seminar retracing the footsteps of these soldiers. Walkabouts during the seminar, to be held May 12 and 13, will explore, among other things, where these men lived and worked.

Here's information to get you started.

Yosemite National Park can be reached using California highways 120, 140 or 41. It is a four-hour drive from Los Angeles or San Francisco. The nearest airport is in Fresno, Calif., 50 minutes south of the park. Winter snows can require the use of chains for two-wheel-drive vehicles.

For general park info click on www.nps.gov/yose, or call (209) 372-0200. Call (888) 514-2167 to reach Tenaya Lodge, or visit www.tenaya-lodge.com. For seminar information call (209) 379-2321.