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Walser village Tenna

Tenna puts itself on the map

The inhabitants of the old Walser village, Tenna, which lies above the primal, wild Safiental valley, are considered to be «frank and forthright» but also open-minded and prepared to give visitors an introduction to their unique culture and region.

Here in the remote Safiental, a side valley of the Rheinschlucht gorge, primeval nature can be experienced in its variety of facets, whether on the many pass crossings in the rugged Rheinschlucht gorge or the tiny Walser villages in the midst of fragrant mountain pastures. One of these villages is Tenna, nestling on a sunny high plateau, from where views of the Safiental valley and the surrounding mountain peaks are already fantastic. Those taking the hiking trail around the village will be even more amazed. Views sweep far across the Graubunden mountain world and deep into the valley of the Rheinschlucht gorge. An especially scenic excursion takes you to the Eschgi reservoir, which snakes between dark fir trees.

The way of life in Tenna is as long-established as its natural surroundings. The village is dominated by the church, its walls embellished with frescos. The houses are in typical Walser style; black-timber clad, decorated with bright, colourful flowers. In contrast to many other mountain villages, Tenna retains a vibrant village life. It seems that the village with around 100 inhabitants has been little affected by the pressures of migration. But time has not stood still in Tenna. Innovative ideas for retaining the school and the Alpine-farming cooperative bear testament to a village community that is committed to looking to the future.

This tiny Swiss ski town recently put itself on the map with the world's first solar wing-powered chair lift! While solar-powered lifts are popping up in ski resorts all over the world, this is the only one with a string of photovoltaic "wings" that float on a string above the lift chairs all the way up the mountain. "Small but beautiful" is probably the correct name for the solar ski lift because it is just 450 meters long. The little lift is quite popular – it shuttles 800 skiers an hour – and its solar wings dot the white slopes with their unique shape, bringing new meaning to the term "black diamond."

When the small town needed to restore their rickety old chairlift in 2010 the city planners decided to go solar. Since the lift's main station had a roof too small to accommodate the number of solar panels needed, a suspension bridge was designed to hold the panels above ground. The 50 yard system of wires holds 82 wings that rotate to follow the sun and can tilt to remove excess snow. The solar modules on the ski lift have an ideal lateral inclination of 30% and travel uniaxially to the position of the sun during the day. The solar system produces around 90,000 kWh a year. For the ski lift operation between 5,000 and 10,000 kWh are needed annually. It has produced about 17 times more electricity than it has used since its inception. This is a solution that not only satisfies in terms of functionality, safety and comfort, but is also sustainable and ecological. The panels also offer skiers a heated seat for their ride up the slopes. This is the first winter sports facility of its kind in the world.

Numerous donations helped the town achieve the goal of building this solar ski-lift. A great effort, considering that the construction of the solar ski lift was about twice as expensive as that of a conventional ski lift. The facility was opened on Saturday, 17.12.2011.

Via DiscoveryImages courtesy of Tenna/swissinfo.ch