



THE  TIMES

## Sunny slopes, pretty villages — and extra skiing in the Swiss Alps



The new cable car PHOTOPRESS/JOHANNES FREDHEIM

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### The new cable car between Arosa and Lenzerheide has tripled the ski area of these sleepy resorts in the Swiss Alps

As I skied into the village of Arosa after a long day exploring the new area it shares with Lenzerheide, my legs felt like jelly. Until recently, the remote Swiss village had only 70km of pistes and though in times past it has been much loved by the Brits, its appeal has waned in recent years. Now these two sleepy resorts have been linked by a fast new cable car that opened last month to form one of the top 10 ski areas in terms of size in Switzerland — it's nearly three times as large as before, with plenty of off-piste.

Arosa has long been a favourite of in-the-know British skiers, who enjoy its location at the head of a beautifully wooded valley two hours by train from Zurich. It's got an old-fashioned appeal, and a village with teashops and chocolatiers. Families visit to toboggan and skate as much as they do to ski. The problem has always been that it lacked extensive skiing: its limited runs best suited intermediates and beginners.

Locals hope the new linking cable car into Lenzerheide, where much more skiing is offered, will bring fresh life to the area. And so did this skier . . . I was going on the week it opened. I hopped on and, from Arosa, I was whisked in five minutes to the "other side".

Prettily set around a lake, Lenzerheide enjoys a decent altitude (1,500m, 5,000ft) and double helpings of sun thanks to ski slopes on both sides of its valley. The day I visited, despite poor visibility first thing in the morning, the sun sneaked out from time to time to expose stunning peaks glistening with snow as far as the eye could see. A good proportion of Lenzerheide's 155km of pistes are tree-lined, which adds to the resort's character, and helps in snowy conditions.

Deciding to make the most of the area, I headed to Parpan, a lift station at the bottom end of the Lenzerheide's valley, where it was just a short walk via a beautiful little hamlet with quaint traditional Swiss houses and a tiny

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church to the Proschieri lift. Hardly anyone was around, just a couple of children having a snowball fight — much quieter than Arosa.

The lift at Proschieri took me to the east-facing slopes that bask in the morning sun — chatting to fellow skiers on the way, I found Lenzerheide's best runs. Intermediate cruising, as I soon discovered, is king here and I enjoyed a morning of thigh-burn exploring the uncrowded and varied blues and reds, with stunning views of the canton of Graubünden (Switzerland's easternmost canton bordered by Italy, Austria and Liechtenstein).

Lenzerheide consists of two main sections, one facing east, the other west. The west-facing side enjoys the afternoon sun. You catch a quick (free) bus between the two, passing through the village of Lenzerheide itself, with its smart shops selling furs and restaurants advertising fondue and raclette. It's all quite well-to-do but not showy; apparently Roger Federer is building a chalet in a neighbouring hamlet.

Everything seemed sleepy on the west slopes, with no daunting, rope-clad skiers setting off to conquer crazy couloirs. Instead, there was a laid-back, friendly vibe. A local, spotting that I was skiing alone, offered to guide me to some good off-piste (but fearing recent avalanche reports in Switzerland and only just returning from a knee injury, I regretfully declined).

The eating in Lenzerheide was excellent. I stopped to refuel at the new Scharmoin grill and restaurant, set at the midstation beneath the dramatic peaks of the Rothorn. Very few of the restaurants have menus in English, so you might need your German phrase book to help decipher the delicious cuisine; though most waiting staff are multi-lingual. This area is renowned for its game — many of the restaurateurs go hunting and shooting — so the *Hirsch* (venison) and *Wildschwein* (wild boar) are not to be missed. I can particularly recommend the *Hirsch* carpaccio, served with rocket, scattered with parmesan shavings and drizzled with truffle oil. Fellow diners were tucking in happily to huge bowls of steaming minestrone soup, bison steaks and veal sausages. All washed down with the decent local red wine.

Back in Arosa I picked gentle blues to ski down to my hotel — the extent of this newly linked terrain all too evident in the jelly-like feeling in my legs — while deciding which of the chic bars and restaurants to visit for après and another helping of *Hirsch*. These villages might have a rare, old-fashioned Swiss vibe but they are certainly not behind the times.

## Need to know

Abi Butcher was a guest of the Tschuggen Grand Hotel, the Switzerland Travel Centre and BA. The Tschuggen Grand ([tschuggen.ch](http://tschuggen.ch)) has B&B doubles from about £340. BA ([ba.com](http://ba.com)) flies Heathrow-Zurich from £133 return. The Swiss Transfer Ticket covers a return journey from Zurich to Arosa from £96, available from the Switzerland Travel Centre (00800 10020030, [myswitzerland.com/rail](http://myswitzerland.com/rail)). Ski Safari (01273 224060, [skisafari.com](http://skisafari.com)) has seven nights' B&B at the Tschuggen Grand, including flights and rail transfers from £1,319pp. Or seven nights' B&B at the three-star Sorell Hotel Arosa with flights and transfers is from £759pp.

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