

A Very Bright Idea



The sun makes life on Earth possible. Almost all plants and animals rely on its warmth and heat to stay alive. For us humans, it also provides many simple pleasures such as long summer evenings, bright winter days and the feeling of warm sunlight on our faces. Imagine the frustration of living somewhere where, even when the sun is shining, people can't feel its heat or appreciate its light. The town of Rjukan, in Norway is just such a place.

For six months of the year, Rjukan, a town of 3,500 people located 100 miles west of Oslo, is cut off from direct sunlight by the steep forested hills that surround it.¹ Of course, many Scandinavian towns and cities suffer from freezing cold temperatures in the winter months, but Rjukan's residents* have had to cope with a complete lack of sunlight as well. In an early attempt* to find a solution to this problem, a cable car was built in 1928, which allowed the town's citizens to ride to the top of the hill and top up* their vitamin D.

These days, however, the people of Rjukan can stand in their central square and enjoy the warmth and the light of the winter sun. How is this possible? What has changed? Well, the answer might seem like something from a science fiction story, but in fact it is reality. Authorities have placed three giant mirrors on top of the hills surrounding the town to reflect light down into the valley.² As a result of this investment the town now benefits from a 600-square-metre area of light which brightens the central square. 'We think it will mean more activities in town, especially in autumn and wintertime,' said Karin Roe, head of the town's tourist office. 'People will be out more.'

The mirrors are controlled by a computer to follow the sun and adjust to the best angle* to catch the rays* and reflect them onto the centre of the town.³ However, it was only made possible with modern technology. Solar panels power equipment to automatically wash the mirrors and move them into position.

Steinar Bergsland, the town's mayor said, 'It is really special to stand in the light down on the square and feel the heat. This is for the pale little children of Rjukan.' A message on the Rjukan tourist website states, 'The square will become a sunny meeting place in a town which is otherwise in the shade.'*

⁴ A similar project was completed in Italy in 2006, when the residents of Viganella installed mirrors on the hills above their village to take advantage of the sunlight that shone there.



Read the text. Complete gaps 1-4 with sentences A-E. There is one extra sentence

- A** The huge mirrors were carried there by helicopters, as part of a project which cost 5 million kroner (£500,000).
- B** This happens because between September and March the sun is so low in the sky that its light and warmth don't reach the small town at the bottom of the valley.
- C** Environmentalists disapprove of the project, however.
- D** However, Rjukan is not the only place to benefit from this kind of scheme.
- E** The idea was first suggested 100 years ago by Sam Eyde, who was responsible for building the town of Rjukan

Read the text again and mark the sentences True/False:

1. Rjukan is a town in Italy where people experience direct sunlight all year round. **True / False**
2. For half the year, Rjukan receives no direct sunlight due to surrounding hills. **True / False**
3. A cable car was built in Rjukan in 1928 to help residents access the nearest town. **True / False**
4. Giant mirrors were placed on top of the hills to reflect light into the town square. **True / False**
5. The reflected light creates a 600-square-kilometer area of light in the square. **True / False**
6. The mirrors are manually controlled by townspeople. **True / False**
7. The project in Rjukan was inspired by a similar project completed in Switzerland in 2006. **True / False**
8. The mayor of Rjukan believes the reflected light will only benefit adults. **True / False**