

South east Wales itinerary: follow the story of the Lords of the Southern March

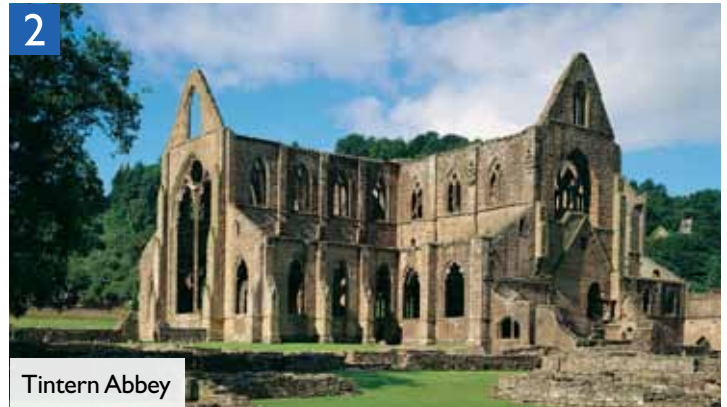
The Lords of the Southern March played a vital – but changing – part in the history of Wales following the Norman Conquest. You can follow the story of the start of the conquest of south Wales and the struggle to maintain supremacy at a cluster of Cadw sites.

The first castle to be built by the Normans in Wales, **Chepstow**, the nearby **Tintern Abbey**, and **Monmouth Castle** were powerful statements of intent to subdue and stabilise Wales. The three castles of **Grosmont**, **White** and **Skenfrith** were built in the Monnow Valley to control the route between Hereford and Monmouth. Discover how together the sites formed part of a robust boundary between Norman England the Welsh kingdoms and explore the development of a different culture and society as a frontier land.



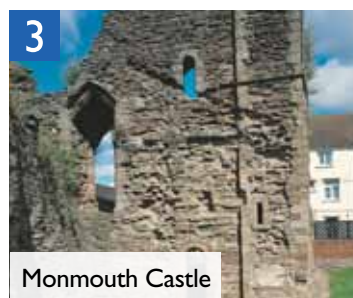
Chepstow Castle

Chepstow Castle is one of the oldest stone fortifications in Britain. Established by William fitz Osbern just a year after the Battle of Hastings, it was so powerful that it continued in use until 1690, including an epic Civil War siege. Century after century, the castle grew and grew along its narrow cliff top ridge. This huge complex, grand castle deserves to be explored; it boasts the oldest castle doors in Europe, all wood and all of 800 years old, and the colourfully decorated Earl's chamber is a feast for your eyes. It's been the subject of many artists, the most famous being Turner.



Tintern Abbey

Just 13 minutes drive from Chepstow you'll find **Tintern Abbey**, the best-preserved medieval abbey in Wales. Founded by Marcher Lord Walter de Clare as a spiritual base for the Norman lords on the England Wales border; Tintern was only the second Cistercian foundation in Britain. The present-day remains are a mixture of building works covering a 400-year period between 1131 and 1536 until the abbey was surrendered to King Henry VIII's officials. Very little remains of the first buildings but you can marvel at the vast windows and later decorative details displayed in the walls, doorways and soaring archways. If you're feeling energetic, take a strenuous uphill walk to the 'Devil's Pulpit' for a wonderful bird's eye view of this great gothic abbey.



Monmouth Castle



White Castle

Travel up the river Wye and the next site you'll see is **Monmouth Castle** commissioned by William Fitz Osborne at the same time as Chepstow, to be the one of the key strongholds of the Norman invasion of Wales. The remains of the great tower date to the first half of the twelfth century and was the birthplace of Henry V. Further west you'll find **White Castle** surrounded by powerful round towers. In 1138, King Stephen united White Castle with **Skenfrith Castle** and **Grosmont Castle** to create the lordship of the Three Castles. In 1201 they came under the control of a single lord, Hubert de Burgh, who knew a great deal about military architecture from his time fighting in France and rebuilt White as a fortress for military work whereas he added domestic apartments to Skenfrith and Grosmount.

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Raglan Castle

While you are in the Monmouthshire area, veering away from the lords of the southern March make sure you also check out **Raglan Castle**, built for show rather than with battle in mind, it still held off Oliver Cromwell's forces for 13 weeks during the Civil War. From the great tower to the great gatehouse, everything is impressive about Raglan Castle.

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The journey time from Chepstow – Tintern Abbey is approx. 15 minutes, 30 minutes Chepstow – Monmouth, 15 minutes Monmouth – Skenfrith and Skenfrith – Grosmont and 20 minutes Grosmont - Raglan.