

TOUR 11 SOUTH WEST

The South West has long been a haven of gastronomic excellence and this 147-mile route journeys through some of the West Country's finest landscapes and lesser-known culinary stop offs. **Jekka's Herb Farm** in Alveston, north of Bristol on the A38, could be a great way to start the day – it generally operates through mail order but they do have open days throughout the year so check the website for dates.

Take the A38 towards Bristol and join the M5, then leave the motorway at junction 25 and head southeast on the A358 towards Ilminster. Turn right at the junction with the A303, and stay on the A303 as it becomes the A30. On the approach to Exeter, take the A3015 and at Countess Weir roundabout, turn left for Topsham. Here you'll find **Darts Farm Village** (Topsham, Exeter, Devon EX3 0QH; 01392 878200; www.dartsfarm.co.uk), on the road leading from the village to the A376, offers a host of activities – stop here and have lunch at **The Fish Shed Restaurant** (Dart's Farm, Clyst St George, Topsham, Exeter, Devon EX3 0QH; 01392 878206).

Make your way back towards Exeter, and turn left at the roundabout onto the A379, finding your way to the A38. The Devon expressway speeds you along the edge of Dartmoor National Park, before you take the A384 and follow the river valley to Dartington and then on to Totnes via the A385. The town has an impressive castle and to the south is the **Sharpham Estate**, housing a vineyard and cheese dairy (Sharpham Estate, Totnes, Devon TQ9 7UT; 01809 732203; www.sharpham.com); watch the cheese being made, and try some from the farm shop.

Back towards Totnes, turn left onto the A381 and drive through Harburtonford and Churchstow, where the road becomes the A379. Cross the River Avon and at the roundabout just before Aveton Gifford, turn left. Follow signs for Bigbury and proceed through the village

to the B3392 which leads to the coast and Bigbury-on-Sea. Just across the beach, or the small expanse of water, depending on whether you arrive at low or high tide, is **Burgh Island**. At high tide, a special sea tractor will convey you through the shallow waters to the Art Deco hotel or the public house, The Pilchard. The island has a long association with guests wanting to escape the noise and pressure of everyday life and relax in style, and the hotel comes complete with 26 acres of parkland and coastline. Have dinner at the hotel – if you're feeling tired after your journey, it would make an excellent place to spend the night.

This drive has been created in association with Michael Caines MBE, Master Chef, and a fervent champion of food from the South West and Co-founder of ABode Hotels.

