

# Just mad about...

Samantha Guerrini journeys to the heart of saffron country to discover more about the world's most expensive spice



**U**nlike most commodities, saffron has retained a consistently high price for as long as humankind has traded wares. Believed to originate from prehistoric Greece, the earliest record of its use is depicted in frescoes excavated on the islands of Crete and Santorini.

Produced from the *Crocus Sativus* Linneaus, the precious spice has been revered by history's greatest civilisations and its uses have been myriad. Homer described the dawn as being a 'crocus veil', Hippocrates believed saffron to be a therapeutic herb, the Babylonians put the flower's vibrant colours to cosmetic use, and Cleopatra wore saffron-scented perfume. Later, during the Middle Ages, its medicinal properties were used to combat many ailments, from epilepsy to depression. If a person was particularly cheerful they were said to have slept on a bag of saffron.

**Rich pickings: saffron is the world's most expensive spice, taking around 75kg of fresh flowers to yield just 1kg of stigmas**

