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**FLAAR**  
MESOAMERICA

Flowers of  
**Palo Jote**  
*Bursera simaruba*

(Chacah, Indio desnudo)

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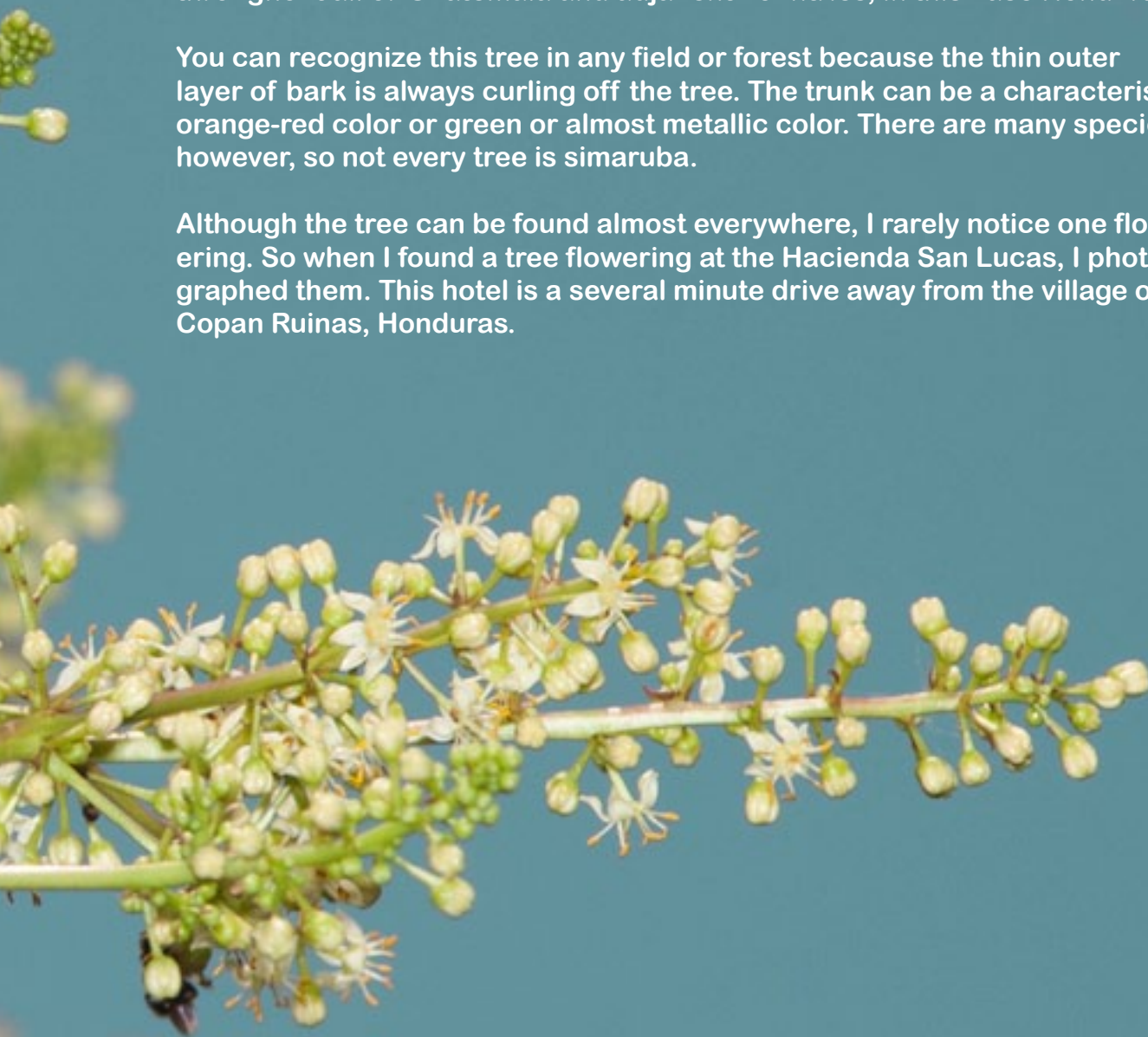


# Introduction

The research of FLAAR Reports on flora and fauna is focused on those plants and animals which were utilized by the ancient Maya. *Bursera simaruba* is frequently stated in botanical discussions to be used for incense. Although I have not yet found villages where it is harvested or processed into incense, we decided to study this tree nonetheless, in part because it is common throughout all of Guatemala and adjacent countries, in this case Honduras.

You can recognize this tree in any field or forest because the thin outer layer of bark is always curling off the tree. The trunk can be a characteristic orange-red color or green or almost metallic color. There are many species, however, so not every tree is simaruba.

Although the tree can be found almost everywhere, I rarely notice one flowering. So when I found a tree flowering at the Hacienda San Lucas, I photographed them. This hotel is a several minute drive away from the village of Copan Ruinas, Honduras.







Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III, 1/160s, f 11, ISO 100, lens EF100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS USM



# Local names for *Bursera simaruba*

A tree may have a different name in each part of the country. The names you hear the most are palo jiote, chacah, or indio desnudo. It is also called gumbo limbo.

The wind was blowing so many of the flowers were moving and not even a high lens speed could stop them. Many wasp-like insects were also moving, even faster than the wind.

Wasps and bees are attracted to the flowers





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## Uses for the tree

The botanical monograph on the flora of Guatemala provides information on the uses record in the 1940's.



Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III, 1/125s, f 11, ISO 100, lens EF100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS USM



# Bibliography

Our extensive bibliography is in our annual report on Maya ethnobotany.

The ethnographic book by Wisdom and the botanical monograph of Standley and Steyermark are in that bibliography.

For *Bursera simaruba* there is a report on this dedicated to this species:

SACAYON, Eduardo and P. Lopez  
CARCAMO  
2008 Distribucion y diversidad  
del genero *Bursera* en Guatemala.  
USAC, Escuela de Biologia, Depto.  
Ecologia, on line. 51 pages.



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