

Plumeria, Flor de Mayo, Frangipani Flowers
Rio Los Esclavos, Santa Rosa, Guatemala



Nicholas Hellmuth, May 2025

FLAAR Reports, FLAAR (USA) and FLAAR Mesoamerica (Guatemala)

This giant *Plumeria* tree is one of the largest I have seen out in the wild in Guatemala. Larger ones are only in cemeteries, since there they are protected for decades.

This frangipani tree is overlooking the Rio Los Esclavos. You can park at the El Puente Hotel Y Restaurante and then walk across the bridge, to see (and photograph) this from the bridge. There is also a place in the back of the hotel where you have a good view.

We have stayed overnight in this hotel; the food in the restaurant is also good.

Notice the tall mountain range across the horizon—so you know you are not that far from Guatemala City.

Photo by Nicholas Hellmuth, March 22, 2017, Sony DSC-RX100M3.



June 27, 2015, so in this year this *Plumeria*, Flor de Mayo, was probably still flowering in July.

Photo by Nicholas Hellmuth with Nikon D800E with 400mm prime Nikkor telephoto lens.

Ten years ago the Nikon we had was the D800E. Now we have a model D810 which is a few years less old. We do not yet have funding to switch to a newer mirrorless Nikon Z series camera.



Photo by Nicholas Hellmuth so you can see the size and shape of the entire tree. If this is one single *Plumeria* tree it's a remarkably mature size.

Notice that leaves cover everything, so you can't see any of the branches or limbs. So compare this to the *Plumeria* on the karst hills along the road to Lanquin, Alta Verapaz—on those flor de mayo trees you see more branches and twigs than leaves and flowers.

On the following pages we show other *Plumeria* several kilometers away (but near the same Rio Los Esclavos). Those other flor de mayo trees are growing ONLY upwards, and not blooming out to the sides.

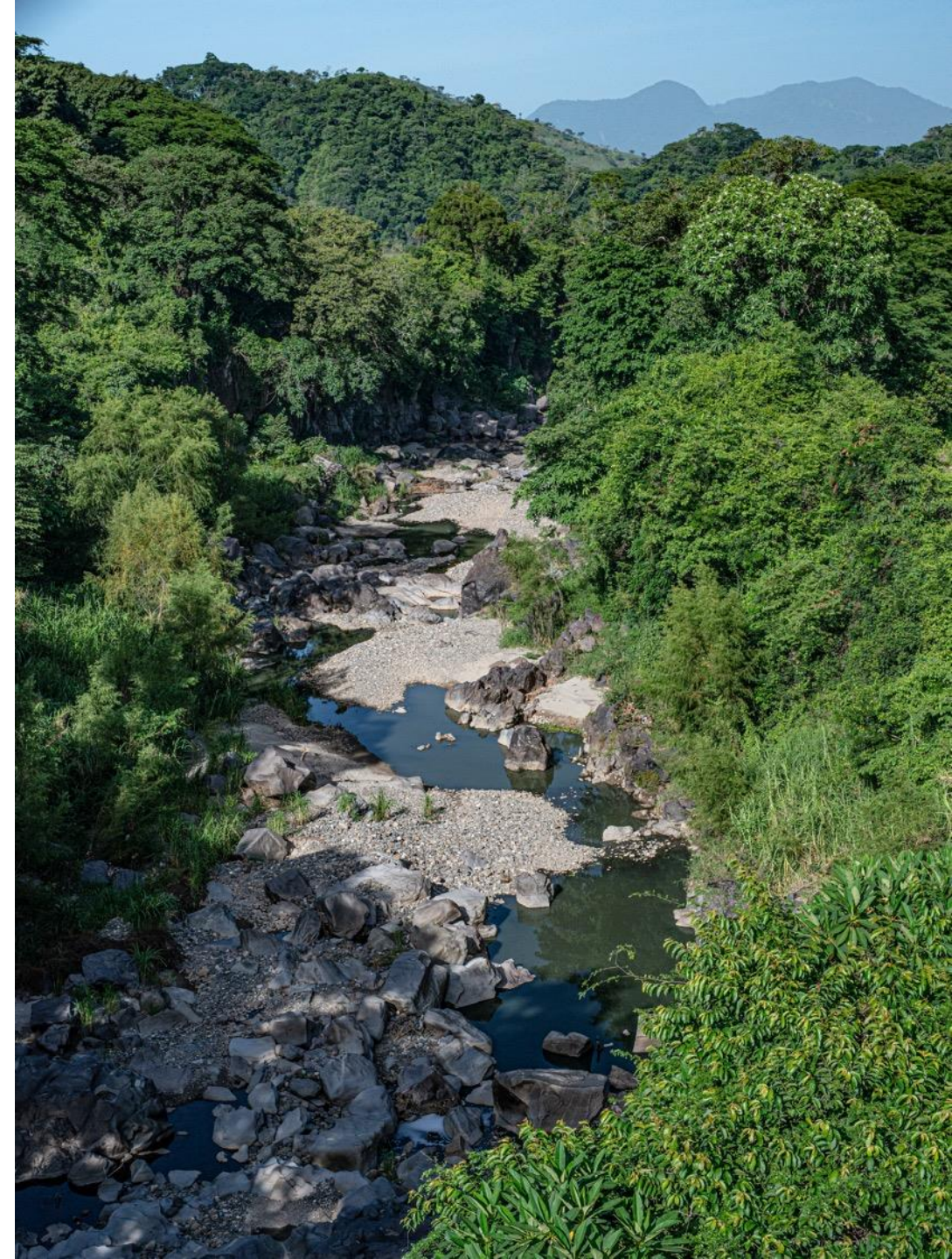


June 27, 2015. Everything is bright green so you can tell that it has rained recently though the river itself is no longer flooded.

In the far right background you can see the mountains that are closer to Guatemala City.

Notice that we have taken all these photographs when the sun is at a perfect angle to illuminate the frangipani tree.

Nikon D800E, 50mm lens. It is essential to have lots of different lenses so you can accomplish lots of different views. Sometimes a horizontal view is more helpful (as here) than a horizontal view.



Other *Plumeria* upstream, Rio Los Esclavos, Finca El Jute

This is the Finca El Jute of Don Juan Carlos. He has several fincas and has kindly allowed us access to study plants and ecosystems on all of his several properties. There are a lot of *Heliconia* on one or two of these fincas, but the present FLAAR Reports is on Flor de Mayo.

Here in the background you can see how far to each side the branches of this *Plumeria* reach. That's because this forest is protected—not burned down.



Wider view of Finca El Jute, with the *Plumeria* in the middle background. Obviously most of the other tree species are taller.

Photo by Nicholas Hellmuth, Nikon D800E camera with 60mm lens.

June 10, 2015, so again, we learn that Flor de “Mayo” can also be found blooming in other months.



Slightly
closer view.



Here you can notice that there are not masses of flowers, but just a few. Is this because it's now June and not April or May? Or is this because there is a lot of shade for several hours a day?



No dead leaves anywhere.



Curving branches.



All the leaves and flowers are facing upwards. If you compare this with the *Plumeria* near the bridge, you see the noticeable differences in how each tree does its best to take advantage of the angle of available sun.



Everything
angling
upwards.





There are no boats available on the Rio Los Esclavos and it would be rather slippery to try to hike upstream. But with a long-distance drone such as the new Mavic 4 Pro drone (due out this week) you could explore more of this area.

In the Lanquin, Candelaria, and Cahabon areas the *Plumeria* grow on karst cliffs or rocky steep hills—because all the lower areas are chopped down and then burned for slash-and-burn milpa agriculture or to prepare cattle fields. If an area is protected the *Plumeria* can grow in other areas.

So far most *Plumeria* trees are not very tall and their trunks are not very thick. But if totally protected for decades, such as on top of Nakum Structure Y or in a cemetery, a *Plumeria* tree can grow a much wider trunk. And in some cemeteries they can grow as tall as many other tree species.

Would be great to have a student do even more field work for a PhD dissertation and find *Plumeria* in areas of Guatemala that we have not yet had time or funding to search. And obviously to have a permit to take plant samples for herbaria—samples for USAC and the herbarium of the student’s home university. It is essential to identify species and regional varieties. For example, are there any other species besides *Plumeria obtusa* or *Plumeria rubra*? Can *Plumeria alba* be found in Guatemala?

Are *Plumeria* flowers really edible? Stephen Facciola, *Cornucopia II* says yes (cited by <https://tropical.theferns.info/viewtropical.php?id=plumeria+rubra>). Lots of reports list medicinal uses (same web page). The *Portal de Biodiversidad de Guatemala* shows specimens only of *P. obtusa* (and a variety) and *P. rubra*. I get more results for those two species from biodiversidad.gt/portal than from the great botanical garden websites elsewhere but surely professional botanists have their own more complete access to databases. Our goal is to find plants in areas not yet studied or even visited by biologists and thereby to provide this information to botanists, ecologists, soil scientists, archaeologists, and students.

Guatemala is a great place to study flora, fauna and biodiverse ecosystems.

