

THE HSPR NEWSLETTER

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Our next meeting will be next Sunday, March 9, 2003. It will be hosted by Dr. Paul Yoshika and his wife Beverly at their beautiful farm close to the town of El Rosario (San Germán). Over the years, Paul has patiently created some stunning water gardens around the house, along with his extensive plantings of heliconias and ornamental gingers. He will also be our speaker of the day, lecturing on the “*Biogeographic Barriers to Hybridization*”. We are all looking forward to hear about it.

We would like to thank Dr. Bryan Brunner and his wife Yarisa for hosting our Christmas meeting. We toured the farm and gardens, and enjoyed his vast collection of heliconias, ornamental gingers and rare fruit trees.

Our sincere thanks go to all those members who donated plants for the raffle. We would specially like to mention the Brooks from *Marin Alto Tropicals*, who brought potted rhizomes of some rare heliconias and gingers.

President's Corner

Next meeting is our first of the year 2003. I think we should start considering a little about the things that we, as a Society, can do from a wider perspective.

I was approached by personnel of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) Cayey campus a month ago. A group of graduate students and some teachers are planning to establish a heliconia garden at the grounds, and they are requesting our help in this matter. They would need plant material and some expertise. The grounds at this campus are well kept and protected, to the extent that parking is far from the buildings and there is a trolley service for the students. Prof. Salvador Alemañy will be with us at the meeting and will further explain on this matter.

I also received a call from Dr. Juan A. Rivero, from the Biology Dept. of the UPR Mayagüez campus, who asked if the HSPR could help with a heliconia garden that will be planted on the grounds of the zoo. As you all know, the Mayagüez Zoo was named after Dr. Rivero, who was its first Director and its main mentor.

I feel very excited about these projects and hope that many members decide to help one way or another. Things like these are the factors that make our organization grow and help *us* grow as individuals too. Let's leave something awesome for the next generation!

Expedition to Hawaii

By Bryan Brunner, Vice President HSPR

Among the favorites on my “wish list” of great places to visit are Hawaii, Costa Rica and Thailand. Last June I decided to make at least one of those dreams a reality. Since finances didn’t allow me to take my family along, I tried to talk a few “plant friends” into going with me, but without success... so I went alone!



Hawaiian plumeria.

After a long but uneventful flight, the plane arrived in Honolulu on Tuesday, June 11 at 6:38 pm. The first thing that struck me as I walked off the plane into the open airport was the warm breeze filled with the intoxicating perfume of plumeria (aleli). I would later find out that plumerias are planted throughout the cities of Hawaii, and create a magical tropical ambiance that is unforgettable. The second thing that caught my attention immediately was the landscaped beauty, even at the airport, where I was greeted by

exquisite Japanese gardens complete with koi ponds! The Hawaiian culture places great value on natural beauty, which is evident everywhere on the islands.

My plans were to do a whirlwind three day tour of Oahu, then to go on to the Big Island of Hawaii for seven more days. The next morning I awoke in the shadow of Diamond Head, at the famous Waikiki Beach.

My first destination was Honolulu’s Chinatown, where I hoped to be able to find some exotic fruits, including ripe durian.

Although I didn’t find any durian, there was a fascinating variety of flowers, herbs, vegetables, fruits, and lots of strange animals and animal parts (alive and dead!) for sale. Banana inflorescences were being offered as a vegetable, and large heliconia flowers were on sale at \$2 each. I bought a few pounds of small, sweet, pinkish lychees at \$4.50 a pound. I then set out in my rental car to Frankie’s Nursery, an exotic fruit farm and nursery in the town of Waimanalo. I decided to take the long route along the southern coast, and was impressed by the incredible beauty of the vertical limestone cliffs shrouded in mist, the emerald green forest, and the intensely blue-green sea topped with foamy white waves.



Bromeliads at Olomana Tropicals, Waimanalo.

Frankie's wife Lynn gave me a tour of the farm and nursery, where I was fascinated to see rare plants like a dwarf ylang ylang, full of flowers and only five feet tall, and a dwarf nispero less than two feet tall, fruiting in a pot! Among the many trees I bought at Frankie's was the kepel (*Stelechocarpus burahol*), the fruit of which is supposed to impart the fragrance of violets to one's body after eating it.

Thursday morning I had the privilege of touring the University of Hawaii facilities and experiment stations with Dr. Robert Paull, Head of the Department of Tropical Plant and Soil Sciences. We also visited commercial fruit farms on the interior of the island, seeing pineapple, lychee and papaya production. In the afternoon I returned to Waimanalo to visit Ken and Lisa Vinzant, owners of Olomana Tropicals, who specialize in heliconias, gingers, and bromeliads. Ken was busy preparing rhizomes for sale in a local festival, but Lisa showed me around her fascinating and colorful collection of bromeliads, some of which she has developed herself.



Burbidgia schizocheila.

On my last day in Oahu I went to Lyon Arboretum, a 194 acre botanical garden affiliated with the University of Hawaii. Lyon Arboretum has a wonderful collection of over 5,000 tropical plant species, including 600 different palms. I was graciously attended by Ray Baker, who gave me a brief tour and helped me obtain rhizomes and seeds of several rare heliconias and gingers, including *Heliconia umbrophila*, *H. magnifica*, *H. mutisiana*, *Zingiber newmannii*, and *Burbidgia schizocheila*.

Saturday morning I took the earliest flight from Honolulu to Hilo, on the Big Island. I arrived at 6:08 am, just in time for the Hilo Farmer's Market, where I was to meet a friend, Oscar Jaitt, who would be my "tour guide" for the rest of the trip. While I was waiting for Oscar, I wandered around the market, feasting on more lychees and enjoying the incredible variety of fresh tropical fruits, vegetables and cut flowers, as well as the beautiful shell jewelry and wood carvings. Fresh cut tropical flowers are used extensively in Hawaii to adorn homes, restaurant tables, hotels, stores, and even cemeteries. Booth after booth at the farmer's market was full of cut heliconias, anthuriums, orchids, and gingers, either sold separately or as beautiful arrangements, all at very competitive prices.



Heliconias and gingers for sale at the Hilo Farmer's Market.

Originally from Argentina, Oscar Jaïtt spent his childhood in California before moving to Hawaii. He and his wife Gabriela have lived for many years in Hawaii, where they have both developed successful businesses; Oscar is the owner of Fruit Lover's Nursery, a rare fruit farm and nursery, and Gabriela sells natural essential oils and cosmetics through her company Alohatotherapy. They were both excellent hosts during my stay on the Big Island, and I sincerely hope they will be able to visit Puerto Rico some time soon.

I would end up writing a book in order to describe all the farms, nurseries, greenhouses, experiment stations, parks and botanical gardens we visited in seven days on the Big Island, so I will just have to mention some of the highlights of the rest of the trip.

Definitely one of the highlights was a night hike up to a live volcano at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. After a grueling two hour hike with flashlights over the jagged lava terrain in our "official" Hawaiian footgear (flip flops), we reached a flow where fresh red-hot molten lava was oozing out of the ground, to slowly harden and turn to rock. We walked through the misty sulfurous smoke, over lava flows only hours old which were still too hot to touch, and it felt like we were witnessing the original creation of the Earth.

Other highlights were a tour of the rambutan and pulasan collections of the National Plant Germplasm Repository in Hilo by the Curator Dr. Francis Zee, a visit to the greenhouses of bromeliad breeder David Shiige, a tour of the facilities at Kapoho Palms and a stop to see the farm and nursery of the largest grafted fruit tree nursery in Hawaii, Plant It Hawaii.

There is so much to see and do in Hawaii that in 10 days I was barely able to scratch the surface. Would I go back? In a second! Anybody wanna go?



Natural beauty on the Big Island of Hawaii.