

# **Elbow-Licking Good!: An early evening chimi crawl gets messy**



When I told my boyfriend I was doing a Chimi Crawl, he responded as would most Americans raised on Taco Bell: “I love chimichangas!”

And while there’s much to love about a deep fried burrito, that’s not what I was talking about. I meant a *chimichurri* crawl, not to be confused with the South American chimichurri sauce that looks like pesto and is used to dress meat and poultry dishes. The chimichurri I was talking about is a Dominican hamburger sandwich with a special sauce.

The idea for a chimi crawl came from my friend Melissa, who texted me after a late night on Broad Street. “Have you ever had a chimi?” Melissa asked. “The Dominican kind?”

As a stereotypical, pumpkin-spice loving white girl, the answer was no.

“There’s a whole other world out there,” she said, describing the dozen or so late night food trucks lined up all along Broad Street, each promising the best chimi around.

Thus, we set a date. On the Saturday before Providence’s Dominican Festival, an apropos time to try our first chimis, Melissa, her friend Carolyn, and I — the *tres blanquitas* — set out toward South Providence just after 6pm. Melissa warned me that we might precede the trucks at such an early hour, but I insisted; although the youngest of the group, I am, at heart, an old maid.

The three of us piled into Carolyn’s SUV and drove past all of the markers I recognized on Broad Street, down as far as the entrance to Roger Williams Park, at which point we turned around. Moving north from this spot is where the trucks start to line up. We parked just a few blocks up, right in front of our first stop: **Johnny’s Chimi Place**.





Johnny's is a classic, having opened in 1993 as a mobile food truck. Now they're planted on the sidewalk near Thurber's Avenue with a few small tables and even a couple of outdoor booths. Even at this early hour, a line was starting to form.

Melissa was our designated speaker since she has the best Spanish (I promised to return the favor if we ended up in a Greek-speaking neighborhood). The painted menu was in both Spanish and English, and we opted for the regular chimi, adding the optional onions and cheese for 50 cents. At the last second, Melissa and Carolyn also got a *Pastelitos de Carne* (meat pie) from the dollar menu because the golden crispy pies looked so tantalizing from the window.

We sat at one of the shaded booths bedecked with a napkin dispenser — an essential resource, we learned almost immediately. The chimis came on long hoagie-like rolls, perfectly grilled, with a hamburger patty in the middle, topped with cabbage, tomatoes, onions, a sprinkle of cheese and the secret sauce: a combination of ketchup and mayo that tasted nothing like either but oozed from each bite and trailed down our hands.

"My God, these taste just like New Orleans' rolls," Carolyn said.

"This is *amazing*," said Melissa.

I was too busy licking my hand to say anything. As an inaugural chimi tasting, this was the quintessential experience.

“Seriously,” Carolyn continued. “It’s like the perfect Po’ boy roll. You don’t get that in Rhode Island.”

“It tastes vaguely Big Mac-y, but better,” Melissa added.

“But the sauce!” I said, the depth of which I understood, yet could not fathom. Within minutes, all evidence of our chimis was gone, with the exception of a giant pile of napkins. A couple of bites later and the pastelito was also gone, and we were off to our next stop.

**La Casa del Chimi** was parked less than a block away from Johnny’s, just in front of CVS. This truck came highly recommended from one of Melissa’s friends. In addition to a regular chimi, we ordered one of the “special” chimis, choosing the beef/pork option. The person who took our order spoke English to us, and we stood on the sidewalk for our made-to-order chimis. I texted my boyfriend photos of the first sandwich as evidence that we weren’t eating chimichangas.

We noticed people setting up in the parking lot behind us, either inside their cars or with lawn chairs, which we were unprepared for. Instead, when our food was ready, we took the foil-wrapped chimis to the concrete steps of a church and sat in front of a sign that said, “*Cristo te ama.*” La Casa didn’t provide us with napkins, so we shared an extra napkin that I happened to carry in my purse, along with plastic cutlery to cut our chimis into thirds.

In this case, the napkin shortage wasn’t dire because the sauce wasn’t as plentiful. We enjoyed the special chimi with the added pulled pork, and in both cases the meat was juicy, tender and well-seasoned. The flakiness of the roll was magnified without the extra sauce, and the cabbage seemed crunchier, which added texture to each bite. By the end of our second round, we were considerably full and could manage only one more chimi.

Our final stop was **D’Colita Chimi**, parked in front of Iglesia Visión Evangélica church. This was a Spanish-speaking-only enterprise, so Melissa placed our order and moments later they called us — the chimi was pre-made, wrapped, and ready to go.

We returned to our concrete steps, this time with napkins, and dove into our final burger-sandwich of the night. This version had a good amount of sauce and the beef was juicy and flavorful. The roll was softer, more steamed than flakey, and all the ingredients melted together in a happy harmony. Our first foray into Dominican street food felt like a success.

We noticed **Universidad de Chimi** roll up just as we were finishing, but our stomachs had reached their max. With several more food trucks on the horizon, it seems we’ll have plenty to look forward to next time.