

Los Chiles “Border Run” Experience February 2019

By Chris Hayes/Grecia

Editor’s note: While the pandemic has changed many protocols, this information is basically still good. There are also people for hire that will take you and walk you thru the process.

Our first run was filled with anxiety, fear, and wonder. The run went fine. We learned a lot and I hope this information will help first timers on their Border Run through Los Chiles into Nicaragua.

What we learned.

#1 key to a successful, low stress process. Upon arrival, park a smile on your face, and exude (to project or display conspicuously or abundantly; radiate) only respect and cooperative attitude to all Immigration folks, and all people, on both sides of the border. They get enough grumps without you adding to the mix.

Depart to Los Chiles very early in the day. Early in the week (M – W) has worked best for us. Avoid Saturdays, if possible. Try to arrive at Los Chiles no later than ~10:30 - 11:00 am. Much less road traffic, no long lines, or really, any lines at all, at Costa Rica (CR) Immigration Exit, Nicaragua (NIC) Immigration Entrance and Exit, CR Immigration Entrance. **Total** turnaround time for us was ~ 45 minutes. No kidding.

When you first arrive at the big orange plastic roadblocks at the CR station, turn right immediately and go to the back of the large, paved, fenced parking lot. No parking fees. Park smartly and walk around on the sidewalk to the front to the CR Immigration metal buildings.

There is a CR Exit fee – 10,000 colones or USD equivalent per person (I think that amount is accurate, it may be less) - to be paid at the little box office window on the left. Get CR Exit Fee Receipt, then go to big box office right behind you. Get in the queue, get stamped out of CR, walk into NIC. Very easy, workable, efficient with no static at all.

Proof of exit method required for NIC inbound. Two or Three different people check when you enter that you have a hardcopy, or cell phone screen picture, of a bus ticket or airplane ticket out of NIC within 90 days. They seem to take this piece of the puzzle very seriously. One guy near us did not have anything and they denied him entry into NIC. Long way to go for no NIC entry. I have heard stories of people selling bus tickets to facilitate NIC exit, at the border, but I did not see anything like this taking place. This piece of the puzzle is way more complicated than need be. There are very few outbound flights from Managua or else where to any place. Work carefully on this component.

Take about minimum 40,000 Colones and \$50 USD to cover all fees. The USD are mandatory to pay the Nicaragua Entrance and Exit > Costa Rica fees. Nicaragua Immigration does not accept Colones. Seems obvious. Until you are in line, trying to leave Nicaragua and have no USD. Can you say panic attack?

How do I get out of NIC? Am I stuck here forever? If you forget to bring USD, there is a solution. There is a NIC ATM, but it has been inoperative for both of our visits. However, there are a couple of guys in the NIC parking lot that “operate” a roving money exchange business. They charged me \$1.00 for exchanging 20,000 colones to USD. A very reasonable fee, considering the serious nature of our game.

Do not take this definitively, but at the Los Chiles into Nicaragua Immigration location, there has been none, zero, nada of the “you need to stay 3 hours, or 30 hours, or 3 days”, or any amount of time to qualify to exit Nicaragua to CR. The word is that this Los Chiles location is much lower key than the big crossing in Guanacaste, which apparently might require a “stay” to allow you back into CR. ***[A large part of the reason that border runs are so ‘efficient’ at the moment (July 2019) is due to the civil unrest in Nicaragua. The authorities do not want foreigners in the country fomenting or witnessing the unrest. However they are very happy (and definitely need) to get those US dollars. Therefore, for the past 6 months at least, 20 minutes in the country is the new ‘norm’. Nicaragua’s laws dictate that foreigners stay in the country a minimum of 3 hours. The 3 day law is very old from Costa Rica and only applies to customs, not migracion. – QPG Ed. dc]***

On our first run, when we were checking into Inbound Nicaragua Immigration with the guy in uniform with the computer behind the window, he actually asked me, unsolicited, (in Spanish) “Do you want to check in to our country and check out, right now, at the same time”?

I said, “Si,”. I forget the exact inbound fees. There are a couple of them totaling maybe \$14.00 ~ \$18.00 USD per person. Do everyone a favor and have small bills including \$1's to facilitate the process. All \$20s won't get it.

So, from this Nicaragua Immigration Inbound window, you can go immediately to the Outbound window in the next building across the patio from the Tourist Information Center. You pay a very small exit fee amount at this window, ~ \$2.00 USD per person. That is it. Unbelievably easy, workable and efficient.

You now walk from the NIC Outbound Immigration building south toward CR. BUT you must make a stop at a tent-covered table on the right with multiple soldiers with multiple machine guns, so they can look at whatever they want to look at. They waved us through. Then continue walking to the border fence. Right before the fence, there is the small hut to check with (same hut as entering NIC). They wave you on to CR.

Then back to the same queue at the Big Metal Building at CR Immigration. No inbound fees here. They stamp you for 90 days. ***[Always remember that 90 days is the max they can give. They can decide to give you less time in the country at any time and at their discretion. –QPG Ed. dc]***. Make sure to check the stamp before you leave the window. You are checking for correct/current stamp date and “90”.

Now, breath a sigh of relief and resume your travels, wherever they may take you.

Enjoy!