

Two thousand Grêmio soccer fans will head to UAE

Brazilian soccer team Grêmio will compete on the FIFA Club World Cup on December 12 to 16 in Al Ain and Abu Dhabi. Qualification increased sales of travel agencies and motivated the fans to visit the Middle East.

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São Paulo – Between 1,500 and 2,000 fans of Brazilian soccer team Grêmio should travel to the United Arab Emirates in the next few days to watch the semifinal and final round of the FIFA Club World Cup on December 12 to 16. The estimative is from the Brazilian Travel Agencies Association (ABAV-RS).

Grêmio's qualification to the Club World Cup increased sales of travel agencies in Rio Grande do Sul and will take many residents of the state to the streets of Abu Dhabi and Al Ain, the cities that will host Grêmio's two matches in the tournament. According to information given to ANBA by Abav-RS' president, João Machado, airline tickets have sold out by this Monday (4). Only higher-price tickets were still available.

Machado says that the time to buy airline tickets was very short. Grêmio's qualification came last Wednesday (29) and the semifinal match will be on next Tuesday (12). "Many people were left out," he said.

Besides the flights by Emirates Airline, the only company to offer a direct flight from Brazil to the UAE, there were alternatives to the soccer fans such as take the routes from other airlines via Ethiopia or with a connection in Europe.

Some fans spent between BRL 9,000 (USD 2,802) and BRL 10,000 (USD 3,114) with airline and hotel, and others spent up to BRL 16,000 (USD 4,982), but the average cost of the trips stood between BRL 12,000 (USD 3,736) and BRL 13,000 (USD 4,048), by Machado's estimate.

In addition, Grêmio's fans should spend with tourism in the UAE. Abav-RS' president says that



those that travel for the games also visit attractions such as the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building in Dubai, or the Ferrari World Abu Dhabi and the Sheikh Zayed Mosque, both in Abu Dhabi. The average stay of the fans will be between six and eight nights, according to Machado. The most sought-after places are the traditional tourist attractions.

In 2010, when Internacional – also a soccer team from Rio Grande do Sul state – competed in the FIFA Club World Cup, the games drew 10,000 fans. The finals were also at the UAE that year, but there was more time for the selling of the travel packages, according to Machado. Internacional didn't qualify for the finals. It lost its first game to Mazembe, from the Congo Democratic Republic, and finished in third place.

ABAV-RS' president believes that this year's semifinal and finals will draw between 5,000 and 6,000 of Grêmio fans. In addition to those taking off from Brazil, fans from other parts of the world should make the trip to watch the games. Grêmio plays its semifinals match on December 12 at Hazza Bin Zayed Stadium, in Al Ain, and the finals or third-place matches (depending on the semifinal's results) on December 16 at Zayed Sports City Stadium in Abu Dhabi.

Grêmio's semifinal opponent will come out from the match between Pachuca, from Mexico, and Wydad Casablanca, from Morocco, set for Saturday (9) in Abu Dhabi. Real Madrid qualified for the Club World Cup and plays on December 13 against the Urawa Red Diamonds, from Japan, or the winner from the qualifying match between Al Jazira, from the UAE, and Auckland City, from New Zealand, who play on Wednesday (6) in Al Ain. The winner of Al Jazira and Auckland faces Urawa on Saturday (9) in Abu Dhabi.

According to a statement released by Grêmio, for the first match the team will stay at the Hily Rayhaan by Rotana Al Ain, in Al Ain, and later will stay at the Park Rotana Abu Dhabi, in Abu Dhabi. The team travels this Wednesday (6).

***Translated by Sérgio Kakitani**

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