

Calcuttans fly out to watch Messi, Ronaldo

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Calcutta: For some, it is a long-awaited family reunion. For others, it may be the last chance to watch Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo and Neymar at a World Cup. But for all of them, it is a celebration of their love for football.

Hundreds of Calcuttans are heading to the US, Canada and Mexico for the FIFA World Cup, with many already on their way and others set to depart over the coming days.

The tournament kicks off on June 11 at Estadio Azteca in Mexico City and will conclude with the final at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey on July 19.

Many of the fans travel-

ling to the US have also attended previous World Cups in Brazil, Russia and Qatar, making the upcoming tournament another stop in their long football pilgrimage.

Cardiologist Rabin Chakraborty, 70, left on Friday night for New York along with his doctor wife Arundhati. They have tickets to watch the Brazil-Morocco match in Group C on June 13 at MetLife Stadium. The doctor couple will be joined by their daughter, Anindita, a child and adolescent psychiatrist, who lives in Michigan.

"It will be a family reunion. My daughter, along with one of my college friends and his daughter, will join us in New York,



Messi during training in Kansas City, in the US, on Wednesday. (Reuters picture)

and we will watch the match together. I also plan to attend a few other games and

have asked my travel agent to arrange the tickets," said Chakraborty, a Brazil supporter.

"My wife is a die-hard Argentina fan, so watching Messi in action is a must," he added.

This is the third World Cup for the couple.

Businessman Arunava Kar, 50, is a Brazil fan and will set up "base" in New Jersey to stay close to his favourite team.

Brazil has established its official FIFA World Cup team base camp at the Columbia Park Training Facility in Morris Township, New Jersey.

"I have heard that the authorities will not allow anyone to be near the camp. However, I will be staying in

New Jersey so that I can get a feel of the team. I am staying very close to the Brazil team's base," said Kar.

He has tickets for pre-quarterfinal matches on July 4 in Philadelphia and the next day in New Jersey. On July 11, he will watch the quarterfinal in Miami and return to New Jersey. Kar and his family have tickets for the July 15 semi-final in Atlanta.

"I have chosen the knockout matches keeping in mind that Brazil could feature in them if they top their group," said Kar. His wife, Rituparna, and son, Abhinava, are expected to join him later in the tournament.

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World Cup fever takes wing

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“The ticket for the final is extremely expensive. I wanted my wife and son to experience the match from the stadium, but a Category 3 ticket now costs around ₹7.5 lakh. So I am still undecided about attending the final,” he said.

Even if Brazil does not make it very far, he has another team to support, Portugal.

“This will be Cristiano Ronaldo’s last World Cup. I want to watch him play. I am a huge fan,” said Kar, who had watched World Cups in Brazil,

Russia and Qatar.

He had watched the thrilling final in Qatar between Argentina and France.

Salt Lake resident Pradip Banik, 53, will be in the US with his son Rishiraj, 18.

This is the second World Cup for the businessman, who had also been to Qatar.

“This time, I am more excited because I am going with my son. We have many relatives in the US and will be visiting them, too,” said Banik.

They have tickets for the July 9 quarterfinal in Kansas and the two semifinals in Dal-

las and Atlanta.

“I am a Brazil fan, but Ronaldo and Messi are also my favourites. In Qatar, I watched the Portugal, Brazil and Argentina matches,” he said.

According to Avijit Das, managing director of Hermes Voyages, more than 250 football fans from Calcutta will travel to the World Cup through his agency alone.

“We have booked trips for more than 250 people. Despite the long journey and the significantly higher costs, demand has been overwhelming,” Das said.