

Raising the stakes

From dark smoke-filled rooms at the back of casinos to a hundred-billion-dollar industry broadcast around the world, poker is still growing fast thanks to the advent of online gaming

In the last couple of years, Poker has seen increased acceptance and popularity across the US, the UK, China and other European nations, and now the online card game has also started to gain immense traction in India.

WORLD SERIES

The annual World Series of Poker® (WSOP) celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2019 with the largest event in World Series of Poker history at the Rio All-Suite Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. Five million dollars made a bumper purse for 'The Big 50' No limit hold 'em; a \$500 buy-in event with 50,000 chips for each player to start with. The longest-running, richest and most

prestigious tournament series was aired exclusively on PokerGO and ESPN, with Femi Fashakin taking home his first gold bracelet along with the \$1.15m jackpot after a gruelling five days of play.

Phil Hellmuth is the all-time World Series of Poker bracelet leader with 15. He is also the all-time World Series of Poker leader in cashes (139) and holds several other significant WSOP records, with career earnings in excess of \$14.4m. Known as the 'Poker Brat' for his temperament at the table, 54 year-old Hellmuth famously beat Johnny Chan to become the youngest WSOP Main Event champion in the 1989 World Series of Poker Main Event. With his victory at the 2012 WSOP

Poker is a game for everyone today; especially after the rise of online gambling

Europe Main Event, Hellmuth is the only person to ever win both the WSOP Main Event as well as the WSOP Main Event. There are also World Series events for the US, International and online. wsop.com

EUROPEAN POKER TOUR

The European Poker Tour, founded in 2004 by winner of the inaugural Poker Million tournament, John Duthie, is now the largest poker tour in the world by both total players and prize pool. The final two legs of the 2019 season

travel to Barcelona (20 August – 1 September) and then Sochi (4-13 October) following tournaments in Monte Carlo (April) and Madrid (June). The Barcelona main-event winner will walk away with more than €1m. pokerstarslive.com/ept

AUSSIE MILLIONS

The Crown Australian Poker Championship, also known as the Aussie Millions, is the largest tournament in the southern hemisphere. The competition is returning with a fresh look in January 2020 with an Opening Event A\$1m (US\$700,000) prize pool guarantee, and the Main Event prize pool expected to be in excess of A\$8.2m (US\$5.7m).

Earlier this year, Bryn Kenney of the USA was the winner of the largest ever Aussie Millions Main Event in history, after defeating a record-breaking Main Event field of 821 players. And in 2018, Toby Lewis claimed the prize money along with a custom-made diamond-encrusted gold bracelet by Anton Jewellery.



Poker at Melbourne's Crown was introduced in June 1997, with the first major championship held shortly after in July 1998. The Main Event was a \$1,000 buy-in Limit Hold 'em tournament that attracted 74 entries. The Crown Australian Poker Championship, or the 'Aussie Millions' as it became known, moved to January in 2001. crownmelbourne.com.au

POKERSTARS CARIBBEAN ADVENTURE

The PokerStars Caribbean Adventure was first held in 2004 on the Royal Caribbean Voyager of the Seas cruise ship, moving to the Atlantis Casino and Resort on Atlantis Paradise Island in The Bahamas the following year, where it remains today.

Above: Mike Matusow and Adam Sandler get ready to compete in the Ante Up for Africa celebrity poker in Vegas
Right: Poker tournaments are popular around the world

With almost 900 entries in January 2019, David Rheem took home \$1.6m of an \$8.4m total prize pool. pokerstarslive.com/pca

WORLD POKER TOUR

Since 2002, the World Poker Tour (worldpokertour.com) has operated a series of international

poker tournaments held at different venues worldwide, with the 9th nine-day WPT Mediterranean cruise aboard Royal Caribbean's Oasis of the Seas setting sail on 1 September. In addition to these events, there are other major tournaments throughout the year. Some are standalone tournaments, but

most are held in conjunction with a tournament series being held at the host casino, like the Commerce Casino's LA Poker Classic, the Grand Sierra's World Poker Challenge and the Bicycle Casino's Legends of Poker. Atlantic City hosts The United States Poker Championship at the Trump Taj Mahal casino, which has been broadcast by ESPN in recent years.

The main live-poker tournament in Africa is the All Africa Poker Tournament hosted by the Piggs Peak Casino in Swaziland, with Macau hosting the Asia Pacific Poker Tour event.

The internet poker revolution has sparked online poker tournaments and series that have become larger than many live tournaments. The World Championship of Online Poker (WCOOP) and the Full Tilt Online Poker Series (FTOPS) are two of the biggest online poker tournament series, with tournament prizes surpassing the million-dollar mark.

In a study released in May 2018, it stated that the online gaming industry is worth a staggering \$116bn. ■

