

Can international students play poker casino

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Unlike other sporting events canceled by the coronavirus, the World Series of Poker, and its millions in prizes, went online. But borders are tricky when it comes to internet gambling.

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For most games during the 2019 World Series of Poker, each table sat nine players and a dealer, with chips and cards trading hands regularly. Credit...John Locher/Associated Press By Kashmir Hill

Three years ago, Maria Konnikova, a writer for The New Yorker, came up with a brilliant stunt for a book about luck. A novice at cards, she would learn poker from one of the game's best players, Erik Seidel, to see if she could improve her odds of winning through study and skill.

She gave herself a year to play, but something surprising happened: She started winning so much money that she put the book on hold.

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After winning over \$300,000, she was finally ready to publish "The Biggest Bluff" this year, on June 23. Normally, that would be smack in the middle of the annual World Series of Poker, or W.S.O.P., at the Rio All-Suite Hotel & Casino, where more than 100,000 players brave the sweltering Las Vegas heat each summer to compete for millions in prizes across dozens of card tournaments.

In-person poker is not a great game for this era of public health protocols, with players crouched over the same table, breathing on one another and using communal cards and chips. In March, some retirees in Florida who had a regular, friendly game were all infected with the virus, and three of them died.

Like the N.B.A., the N.H.L. and the N.C.A.A., the World Series of Poker, which is owned by the casino giant Caesars Entertainment, had to postpone its in-person event; unlike the others, it was able to move the tournament online, even as its Rio casino remains closed while some of its other Las Vegas properties have reopened. But the complicated legality of internet gambling in the United States and around the world, along with inevitable tech issues, meant the transition has not been entirely smooth.

For the first part of the series, players needed to get to one of two U.S. states, and then, if they wanted to compete for the big money, they had to get out of the country entirely — forcing them to decide whether their potential winnings were worth the risk of traveling abroad.

The series kicked off in July using the W.S.O.P.'s software. More than 40,000 people participated, and they had to provide identification and proof of address, and they had to be, as determined by the geolocation settings on their devices, in New Jersey and Nevada. "A drivable option from either coast," according to Ty Stewart, the W.S.O.P.'s executive director.

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Those are states where Caesars holds licenses to operate online gambling.

Konnikova had not left her Brooklyn apartment since early March. Her book had come out as scheduled, and sold well. Publicizing it on the poker circuit didn't work out, but reflecting on what she could control helped.

"We don't know when there will be a vaccine," she said. "We don't know so much about the virus. What I can do is choose what information to pay attention to. You have to pay attention to the right things in poker or you will lose."

At the beginning of July, she and her husband drove about 90 minutes from their home in New York, where online poker was illegal, to a small Airbnb on the New Jersey shore, where it was lawful. Konnikova spent the days swimming and promoting her book, and then at 6 each evening set up her laptop on a patio overlooking the water to participate in the day's tournament. She played there until a dying battery or the mosquitoes forced her inside the studio apartment, where she would sit in the dark at the kitchen table until the early morning hours while her husband slept.

Another New Yorker set up an even more temporary residency in New Jersey: On a Sunday evening in July, Ryan Depaulo, who lives in Manhattan, rented a car and drove across the Hudson River to a Whole Foods parking lot in Closter, N.J. He parked and played through the night on a laptop using the shopping plaza's Wi-Fi connection, which booted him every hour, forcing him to play on his phone intermittently. Late into the night, a police car pulled up next to him.

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"I told them I was playing in the World Series of Poker and didn't think I'd be here this long," Depaulo said. "They told me to win."

He did. Depaulo came in first place out of 1,624 entries in the no-limit Texas Hold 'em tournament around 6:30 a.m. that Monday, taking home nearly \$160,000 after buying in for \$500.

He spooked a masked person entering the Whole Foods when he screamed from his car: "I'm a legend. I'm a god." In a YouTube video, he proudly displayed the cup and bottle into which he had urinated as he had no access to a bathroom through the night.

"I didn't want to risk driving while playing," he said in a phone interview. "It felt like the safest move was to pee in the car."

Konnikova cashed in two tournaments, but she also had to deal with bad luck in the form of technical glitches. During two tournaments, the W.S.O.P.'s software, which is provided by 888Poker, froze up for her. She could see her cards — memorably, in one instance, an ace and a king which is one of the best starting hands in Texas Hold 'em — but she couldn't make any bets. She watched helplessly as her digital stack dwindled as hands went by and minimum bets were withdrawn.

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It wasn't just her. Daniel Negreanu, a professional player from Canada who is one of poker's highest earners, with over \$42 million over his lifetime, was so incensed by the glitchy software that he picked up his laptop and pretended to punch it, while littering his Twitch stream with expletives. (Negreanu, who is also GGPoker's spokesman, was later suspended from Twitch for threatening an online commenter with violence.)

"I have a temper," Negreanu said. "It was my raw emotion. I know I act like an idiot."

The World Series of Poker has dozens of different tournaments, but most people are familiar only with the two-week-long "Main Event," a spectacle broadcast live on ESPN in recent years. Players pay \$10,000 each to compete for millions of dollars and a championship gold bracelet.

In 2003, an amateur player — a Tennessee accountant with the fitting name Chris Moneymaker — won the tournament and \$2.5 million, inspiring other novices to try their hands at the game, ushering in a poker boom that dramatically increased the number of people playing, both in card rooms and online.

But that online boom was cut short in 2011, on a day deemed "Black Friday" throughout the poker community, when U.S. prosecutors shut down the three biggest online poker sites and seized their assets, including the bankrolls of thousands of players. The sites had wagered that poker, a game of skill and not just chance, was allowable despite federal laws against online gambling. Prosecutors disagreed.

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As a result of the shutdown, most international online poker sites stopped letting people from the United States use their sites.

So, in August, when the world series moved from WSOP.com to a site called GGPoker, players who remained in the United States were out of luck, particularly because the most lucrative events were scheduled for then, including the "Main Event," which, for a mere \$5,000 entry fee, offered a chance at a \$3.9 million first-place prize. (The in-person version of the tournament last year had more than double the prize pool and a top prize of \$10 million, and the entry fee was \$10,000.)

"Given travel restrictions to and from the U.S.A., it would have been impossible to achieve international participation, even online through WSOP.com, without a licensed third-party to serve these customers in their home market," the W.S.O.P.'s Stewart said.

It would also have been a far smaller event had it remained in the United States.

GGPoker, which launched in 2017, is based in Canada and Ireland with gambling licenses in the United Kingdom, Malta and Curacao. It paid W.S.O.P. a licensing fee to host the tournament. As of mid-August, over 170,000 people have played in the international events.

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Konnikova is not one of them because she refused to get on a plane for fear of the coronavirus.

“I wanted to drive to Canada,” Konnikova said. “If the border had been open, we would have gone.”

Canada, along with many other countries, wasn’t admitting Americans because of the U.S.’s surging number of coronavirus cases. Some parts of Mexico were letting Americans in but only by plane, not by car. Many of the game’s most well-known players, such as Negreanu, Phil Hellmuth, Maria Ho, and poker vlogger Brad Owen, got on planes bound for Cabo San Lucas, Mexico.

Negreanu, who is a Canadian citizen, could have gone to Canada, but he and his wife preferred to be on a beach so they chartered a private plane from Las Vegas to Cabo, because it seemed like the safest and nicest option in Mexico. “We looked at the Covid numbers and Cabo was by far the least affected,” he said.

“There are very few countries that allow us,” Seidel said. One of the highest grossing poker players ever, he originally wanted to go to Tokyo before realizing Japan wasn’t accepting Americans. He wound up in London, in part because his daughter lives there.

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Traveling internationally to play in tournaments isn’t unusual for professional live tournament players, but doing so just to sit in front of a computer screen is. Playing online, rather than in a card room together, also adds the complication of new kinds of cheating.

“Anytime you’re online there’s a concern,” Seidel said. “People can be sharing cards or have other people giving them advice or people using software that tells them how to play.”

Many players mentioned a “ghosting” scandal from earlier this year, where a professional player used the online account of an amateur.

“The only thing that makes me more comfortable is that the honest players all do well anyway,” Seidel added.

The series left many players miffed that the U.S. has not legalized online poker federally. On Twitter, players without the means to get abroad talk about using virtual private networks, known as V.P.N.s, to try to circumvent geolocation restrictions to play.

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“It’s a risk — if you V.P.N. from the U.S. and someone sees you at the grocery store in Chicago the next day,” Negreanu said. “If you get caught, you have your funds confiscated.”

Negreanu condemned the law, rather than the players trying to break it.

“The U.S. law is dumb. It’s stupid,” he said. “I don’t care what couch you play from.”

“The demand is huge. Poker is a game of skill,” said Faraz Jaka, a professional player who flew from San Jose, Calif., to Cabo last month. “When we see more legalization, we won’t have to run around the whole world to sit in front of a computer.”

The prohibition on online poker, intended to protect people from the societal ills of gambling, doesn’t mix well with a pandemic, resulting in travel that is risky not only for the players but for the destinations to which they are traveling.

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“I don’t think it’s ideal. I don’t think people should be traveling right now unless they really, really need to,” Konnikova said. “A lot of poker players will say, ‘I need to; this is what I do.’ If they can’t play live, they have to go where they can.”

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When making your Vegas checklist it should include a show, at least a couple meals at a Vegas restaurant, but before you check out the best nightlife anywhere, you should learn how to play the classic and popular Texas Hold ‘Em poker in a Vegas casino.

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You may have perfected your poker face, but you still need a few tricks up your sleeve before hitting the tables. Poker is one of the most common, yet strategic games on the Las Vegas casino floor, and the various types all have different rules. Texas Hold ‘Em is the most popular variation of poker, and has the same hand hierarchy and basic rules as traditional poker, so it’s great for beginners. Continuing our gaming series, there a few Texas Hold ‘Em poker pointers that can help you rake in winnings. After all, Texas Hold ‘Em is the game played in the World Series of Poker Main Event annually at Rio All-Suite Hotel & Casino.

In Texas Hold 'Em, each player is dealt two pocket cards, and then five community cards are revealed. There are four rounds of bets—once after the hole cards are dealt, and then three rounds as different community cards are revealed. Players must make the best poker hand combination possible with their five cards.

Want to go all in and play poker? After betting big, cross your fingers for one of Texas Hold 'Em's star hands, such as a Royal Flush, Four of a Kind, Full House and Two Pair.

You may not be ready to enter the WSOP's finals table just yet, but you might get a few winning hands. Check out more poker tips and find out when to call, bet or fold.

If you still don't think you're ready for the WSOP, belly up and hone your Texas Hold 'Em skills at any of these Caesars properties:

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Is it legal to play real money online poker in California? The answer to this is also yes!

California is the largest state in the Union by population, and it isn't even close. With 39.5 million people calling themselves citizens of this great state, it is no surprise to learn that the largest amount of player traffic to US-friendly poker sites emanates from The Golden State.

Unfortunately, California has not managed to pass any state-wide regulation of poker online or any form of online gambling. It seems that every time a bill comes up for negotiation, the established powers go to war and strike it down. Whether it is politicians angling for more kickbacks, Native American Indian tribes battling amongst themselves for carve-outs, or special interest lobbying by existing poker sites hoping to get "bad actor" clauses passed to keep the competition away, there just doesn't seem to be any consensus.

Fortunately, however, California online poker is not illegal. Neither Federal law nor California state law prohibit citizens from partaking in real money online poker games. You may have heard of UIGEA or Black Friday, but those events do not make your favorite pastime a crime.

UIGEA was snuck into law on a must-pass Port Authority bill by two Senators on the take from the US Casino Lobby. The law shook up the scene, but it targeted the banks and credit cards, not private citizens. Ultimately, UIGEA's policies and certain interpretations of The Wire Act of 1960 led to the ill-fated closure of a number of top poker sites by the US Department of Justice on "Black Friday," April 15th, 2011. However, since then, the DOJ has reversed its negative interpretation of The Wire Act, opening the way for more sites to service the US markets.

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Online poker sites have taken notice. As of this moment, there are nearly a dozen sites serving US players. Of those sites, none of them block Californians from partaking in their games. Professional Rakeback's staff has combed through them, played on them extensively, and chosen the most reputable, reliable, and fastest-paying California poker sites to offer to our customers. Directly below, you will find our overviews of our favorite poker rooms, links to more full-featured reviews of those sites, and direct sign up links if you want to get started right away.

In order to help you avoid shady and fly-by-night operators, we've taken a good, hard look at all the legal online poker California sites to present you with only top-notch options. Online gambling in California is exciting enough without your taking any unnecessary chances with your valuable money. We've considered the speed of payouts, multi-device compatibility, traffic numbers, and many other factors when coming up with our shortlist of the best online poker sites for California residents. We are professional poker players and long-time enthusiasts of the game, and below you will find what we consider to be the best online poker sites California has to offer.

Ignition is the Cali-friendly internet poker room with the greatest number of games running on average and action sometimes going up to \$10/\$20. Some of the formats spread include NL Hold'em, LHE, PL Omaha, fast-fold tables, SNGs, Jackpots, and tournaments. Speaking of tournaments, there's a \$150K Gtd event every week and regular MTT series that award seven figures in prize money. All play is anonymized at Ignition to protect recreational users from being targeted by sharks.

The poker software here comes in Mac and PC downloadable forms as well as a web client that you can access from your phone or tablet. Get a 100% up to \$1,000 poker bonus (150% up to \$1,500 for Bitcoin deposits) at Ignition as well as another \$1,000 for casino games.

Sportsbetting.ag is the third-largest room for Americans with blinds as high as \$5/\$10 in NL Texas Hold'em cash games. PLO and PLO/8 await you too as does the increasingly popular 6+ Hold'em. SB.ag houses the largest Bad Beat Jackpot currently available to U.S. players – it has occasionally topped \$1 million before! SNGs, fast-fold Boost poker, MTTs, and lottery-inspired Windfall poker are also present. Grow your bankroll with leaderboards for sit-n-gos and cash games.

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You can install SB Poker on your Windows or Mac desktop, and there's also an excellent mobile product for iOS and Android. You'll get a 100% up to \$1,000 poker bonus on your first deposit, and other promotions apply to the attached sportsbook and casino.

As a partner of Ignition, Bovada has all the same poker games and players as its sister site. What sets Bovada apart, though, is that it lets you bet on sports and horses too within the attached sportsbook and racebook. Even wagers on esports, politics, and television programs are possible in addition to more standard fare, like NFL football, MLB baseball, NCAA college athletics, et cetera.

Bovada is compatible with mobile (iOS, Android, and more) and desktop systems (PC + Mac). The poker bonus is 100% up to \$500, and there are casino and sports deals worth up to \$3,000 and \$250 respectively. BTC users get even larger bonuses.

BetOnline.ag is a partner site of SB Poker, and so you will encounter all the same games and tables at either site. BOL is especially renowned for the quality and responsiveness of its mobile client, which is available for iOS and Android. In addition, there's a web-based interface that's compatible with other mobile systems, Mac, and Linux. The entire gamut of poker games that's accessible from your desktop is also found in the mobile poker room.

BetOnline's poker bonus is a 100% up to \$1,000 match. In addition, you will be able to claim a 100% up to \$1,000 sports betting cryptocurrency bonus, three separate 100% up to \$1,000 casino welcome bonuses, a \$25 risk-free horse racing bet, and many other promos.

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Everygame lacks the bustling lobbies of some of its more-frequented competitors, but where it shines is in the value of its promotional offerings. 36% rakeback is standard, and you'll be able to boost your fortunes even more with the weekly rake races, reload bonuses, overlay tournaments, VIP levels program, and other rewards.

Americas Cardroom is where you want to be if you intend to build up a bankroll from nothing. There are numerous freerolls, freebuys, and micro-stakes tournaments where you can participate for a pittance. Notably, ACR is one of the few poker options that still has \$0.01/\$0.02 cash game tables. Of course, there are a lot of higher-stakes games too if you already have the funds to play in them.

Americas Cardroom supports Windows machines, and there's a limited mobile app too. Our ACR bonus code PRB10FREE is good for a \$10 no deposit bonus. Upon making your first deposit, you'll get 100% up to \$2,000.

Coin Poker is a crypto-focused poker room that has implemented several innovative technologies that are not commonly found at competing sites. There's an in-house token, CHP, that fluctuates in value against USD as well as more well-known coins, like Bitcoin. Then there's a decentralized shuffling algorithm, ID verification through Civic, and a couple of other newfangled elements present.

CoinPoker has software that works with PCs, Macs, Android, and iOS. CoinPoker lacks a signup bonus, but it is possible to get 30% weekly rakeback if you hold a balance of CHP, CoinPoker's proprietary crypto coin.

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Juicy Stakes is a sister site of Everygame. The poker side of things is virtually identical although Juicy lacks a sportsbook and a few of the additional casino gaming options that Everygame has. Juicy Stakes nevertheless is a fine place to play because of its frequent promotions, like overlay tournaments, free blackjack bets, freerolls, and reload bonuses.

Juicy Stakes downloads are provided only for Windows PCs. Nevertheless, you can play on your mobile device or Mac computer through the Instant Play feature on the website. Newcomers can look forward to a 200% up to \$1,000 poker bonus as well as 25 free slot spins.

BlackChip Poker is part of the same network as Americas Cardroom, so it has most of the same tables and tournaments. These tournaments are many and varied, and they include a weekly \$215 Sunday Special with \$200,000 guaranteed, a recurring \$5M+ Venom event, and numerous MTT series that often come with eight figures in prize pools. When you sign up through our links, you'll get 27% BlackChip Poker rakeback.

BCP provides desktop software that works on Macs and Windows. Furthermore, there's a mobile client, but it only contains a few of the types of games available at BlackChip. Beyond the 27% rakeback deal, BCP also will reward you with a 100% up to \$2,000 first deposit bonus.

True Poker – part of the Winning Poker Network along with Americas Cardroom and Black Chip Poker – is a fine destination if you seek a comprehensive rewards program to compensate you for your frequent play. Through its Elite Benefits program, True Poker gives back cash bonuses and other perks to its loyal customers. The rate of return gets better and better the more volume you put in.

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For the best gaming experience at True Poker, you ought to download either the Windows or Mac poker client. A mobile poker room also exists, but the selection of games on it is very narrow. Deposit at True Poker and get a 100% up to \$2,000 bonus.

SwCPoker is a Bitcoin poker room that spreads, in addition to NL Hold'em and PL Omaha, Razz, HORSE, Open Face Chinese, 2-7 Triple Draw, and a whole host of other poker variants. There are many freeroll opportunities in these various types of games to give you the chance to play them without committing your own funds.

Though SwC used to only be available for Windows PCs, it now boasts compatibility with mobile OSes as well as Mac. There's no initial deposit bonus, but you can obtain periodic rakeback payments through the Krill rewards system.

Nitrobetting is another poker site that transacts solely in Bitcoin. There's No Limit Hold'em, Pot Limit Omaha, Limit Hold'em, 6+ Hold'em, and Crazy Pineapple waiting for you to take a seat. Nitrobetting rewards its regular users with weekly freerolls and free BTC credits through the Nitro Rewards program.

All of the poker rooms we've told you about above are fine destinations for real-money online poker in California, and we can't really say that any one is the best. The most satisfying place to play for you personally will depend largely on your own preferences and the styles of poker you're most comfortable with. We do have a set of considerations that you may wish to keep in mind when making your decision.

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- ☛ If you're looking for the poker sites with the most active tables, then Ignition and Bovada have the most games running.
- ☛ If you want a high rakeback percentage to increase your long-term profitability, Everygame or BlackChip may be right for you.
- ☛ If a remunerative first deposit bonus is your principal concern, then Ignition has a \$1,000 deal (\$1,500 with BTC) that clears pretty rapidly.
- ☛ If you're interested in fast-fold poker, then Ignition, Bovada, SB Poker, BetOnline, Americas Cardroom, BCP, and True Poker all have such a product.
- ☛ If you'd like to try out mobile poker, then the apps from SB.ag, Ignition, BetOnline, and Bovada are all excellent solutions.

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- ☛ If you're eager to compete against soft opposition, then Ignition, Bovada, Sportsbetting Poker, and BOL provide the means to do so.