

NEW CAST: tourists are flocking to the complex, right, that was once *Eldorado*, to stay in its apartments and villas, above

Meet the stars for some

SEA, SUN AND SOAP

FLOPPED telly soap *Eldorado* has a new name and a new cast... but don't expect another series of sun, sex and sangria.

The BBC programme's dream film set near Malaga – which cost £10 million of licence-payers' money – has re-opened as a holiday resort!

Tourists are flocking to the siesta-filled spot – now named Castro Dacuan after a local town – and are paying around £30 a night to stay in converted studios and dressing rooms.

The BBC lost millions when they axed *Eldorado* four years ago after just 156 episodes.

The programme had opened in a blaze of sunshine and publicity in July 1992, gaining seven million viewers.

It appeared to have all the ingredients of successful soaps, but it wasn't long before the sun went down on the series and it became known as "Hell-dorado".

And once the TV crews, producers and actors had finally left, the BBC got rid of the remaining technology and sets for a pittance.

The filming and editing equipment was sold off for less than £500,000 and the huge set was bought back by locals for a token £2,000.

Spanish developer Jorge Salviche is the man behind the up-market holiday camp. He still can't believe how popular the re-launch has been.

"Everything we found here was properly done, he explains. No short cuts. The construction was first

class. I was expecting to find a cardboard place. I just don't understand why the BBC walked away from this."

Jorge has cashed in on the sale of *Eldorado*. The set's shops are now home to local craftsmen who churn out souvenirs and the lake has become a scuba diving complex.

And that's just the beginning. Jorge and his partner plan to inject up to £3 million into the resort over the next few years.

Sight-seeing punters can take in the doctor's house, the bookshop and the *Eldorado* theatre and bar which is now strewn with old bottles of spirits and beer. Three houses in the old town square have also been converted and can be rented for around £350 a week.

You might even bump into a few former *Eldorado* stars if you take a break on the sun-drenched set.

Some of the cast members have made their permanent homes in Spain, as have crew and cameramen.

Actress Polly Perkins who played the soap's tart-with-a-heart, Trish Valentine, lives just 20 minutes from the set on the coast near the village of Coin. Polly now works as an agony aunt for a local English-language television station.

And Franco Rey, who played the part of Dr Roberto Fernandez, had lived in London for 20 years before joining the series. He then decided to up sticks and move to Spain with his family and has lived there ever since.

Rey is full of bitterness about the soap. He decided not to go to the final farewell party thrown by the production company.

"I was the only actor who refused. They rang and pleaded with me to turn up. 'No. I don't go to my own

funeral,' I said." Rey now has his own restaurant in nearby Benalmadena. To this day, he still gets fan mail and is asked for signed photographs.

It looks like the skies are brighter above *Eldorado* and that this infamous remnant of British soap history could thrive again. Business is booming for Senor Salviche.

"Our guests can go home and tell their friends how they stayed on a film set," he says.

JANE BARRIE

Take a break on the BBC's Hell-dorado flop film set

HANGING ON: Franco Rey and Polly Perkins still live in Spain



EL DORADO
BAR-RESTAURANTE