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## From holiday heaven to Devil's Island: Canaries the location for Papillon remake

- Second recent production set in volcanic archipelago
- Authorities hope publicity will boost local economy

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**Graham Keeley** in Madrid  
The Guardian, Tuesday August 19 2008

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Steve McQueen as Henri Charrière in the 1973 film Papillon, which is being refilmed in the Canaries. Photograph: The Kobal Collection

To most, the year-round sunshine and relaxed atmosphere makes them the perfect holiday destination, rather than the ideal setting for a grim prison colony drama. But authorities in the Canary Islands appear only too happy to see them transformed into the location for a remake of the classic film Papillon to attract Hollywood glamour - and cash.

Thirty-five years after the 1973 classic, in which Steve McQueen and Dustin Hoffman starred in the story of two men struggling to escape from a prison island, filming on a remake is to begin next year in the Canary Islands. Branko Lustig, the Los Angeles producer behind Schindler's List and Gladiator, is to shoot the new version of the film, which was nominated for Oscars for the on-screen chemistry between its stars.

The film told the real-life story of Henri "Papillon" Charrière, who was condemned to life on Devil's Island, off French Guiana, for a crime he did not commit and staged countless failed escape attempts before finally making it to freedom.

Robert Downey Jr has been tipped to take McQueen's part as Papillon, while Philip Seymour Hoffman has been fancied to take Dustin Hoffman's role of Louis Dega, who plots with Papillon to

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escape.

Lustig, who is to team up with Spanish partners Atlantia Canarias in the £45m production, will be the latest big name from the silver screen who is helping to transform the Canary Islands into the new location of choice for film-makers. Until now the islands have been more popular with holiday or documentary film-makers. But earlier this year Spain's Oscar-winning director Pedro Almodóvar shot some scenes from his next film Broken Embraces in Lanzarote, putting the volcanic island on the cinematic map.

Almodóvar was captivated by the "sombre, monochrome beauty" of its black lava beaches and cactus deserts. Writing in his blog, he said: "The volcanic origin of the island makes being there an emotional interior journey.

"When I first visited Lanzarote I found the landscape profoundly disturbing. I had never seen colours so dramatically dark. And I, so fond of brilliant, clashing colours, was fascinated by the subtle obscurity of the place. Black had never formed part of my palette," he said.

Almodóvar shot scenes at Gulf beach and the cactus garden at Guatiza, a former quarry for volcanic rock. The plot for Broken Embraces, starring Penélope Cruz, is said to be based partly on Hollywood film noir, though the director has refused to reveal more.

Lustig, who visited Tenerife for talks with the local government, which is to part-finance the Papillon remake, said: "The authorities here are not doing this because they like films but because they like money. We will film their streets, their people and export the image of the Canaries. Making films is the best way to make money."

Other parts of Spain have, until now, been better known as film locations. The desert in Almería was the setting for many of Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns, while the gothic architecture of Barcelona has served as a backdrop to a number of films, including Woody Allen's next movie, Vicky Cristina Barcelona.

Some Tinseltown glamour may have the "Notting Hill effect", lifting property prices that have fallen on the islands, like other parts of Spain.

Gareth Milton, operations manager of propertyshowrooms.com, said: "The Canaries have suffered a downturn in property prices in keeping with the rest of Spain, but the presence of Almodóvar in Lanzarote has already created a stir in terms of the amount of enquiries we are getting for properties."

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