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Norbert Schurer

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EXPLORING THE CULTURAL HEART OF EUROPE INSIDE OUT Berlin is much more than the former capital of Nazi Germany. At the political and geographical center of the Second World War and the Cold War, the city has also been at the cultural heart of Europe for hundreds of years--and continues to set architectural, musical and fashion trends in the twenty-first century. Similarly, Berlin produced authors such as Theodor Fontane and Bertolt Brecht and now serves as inspiration for postmodern and postcolonial literature by the likes of Emine Sevgi Ozdamar and Gunter Grass. Located along the Spree River in eastern Germany's verdant Brandenburg landscape, Berlin is a relative latecomer among Europe's capitals. It was a mere village as late as the seventeenth century and not unified into one metropolis until the 1920s. Even today, the various communities that now make up the city have their own distinctive identities. Berlin has been shaped by politicians such as Frederick the Great, dictators like Adolf Hitler and architects such as Karl Friedrich Schinkel and Hans Scharoun, yet none of these individuals managed to put a decisive stamp on the city: because of its turbulent history, Berlin has had to reinvent itself again and again. The staid baroque capital of Prussia was succeeded by the up-and-coming capital of newly united Germany; village homes replaced by tenement housing; the hierarchical orderliness of the early twentieth century followed by the avant-garde statements of modernism. After the destruction of the Second World War, the Wall cut the city in half and created the brooding image of the Cold War frontier; since the dramatic collapse of the Wall the latest version of a unified Berlin has arisen as new Germany's capital. In its current incarnation Berlin has been characterized as "poor, but sexy" by its own mayor. It may not aspire to the beauty or grandeur of Paris or London, but rather embraces being an exciting and innovative place sought out by artists and entrepreneurs from all over the world. Norbert Schurer's cultural guide explores the juxtaposition of Berlin's past and present in history, architecture, literature, art, entertainment and religion, and offers an insider account that provides contexts to make sense of Berlin's dazzling variety.

About the Author Norbert Schurer, a long-time resident of Berlin, currently lives in California and teaches English literature at California State University, Long Beach.