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TREASURE TROVE:
(From left) A seated Buddha in gilt bronze, a pilgrim's bottle made of terracotta, a bronze standing Buddha and a rare silk painting of the Bodhisattva-Padmapani.

Go on a pilgrimage to an exhibition of rare Buddhist art

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ARTS REPORTER

FOR more than 800 years, pilgrims flocked to Nalanda in India to study Buddhism.

Now that ancient university is the subject of an exhibition at the Asian Civilisations Museum called *On The Nalanda Trail: Buddhism In India, China And Southeast Asia*.

Visitors follow the pilgrimages made by three Chinese monks – Faxian, Xuanzang and Yijing – who travelled from China to Nalanda at various times between the 5th and 7th century.

On show: different styles of Buddhist art shown in paintings and sculptures, and unusual objects such as eye shades for desert conditions and a pilgrim's bottle, which provide a glimpse into the way of life of travellers, traders and monks along the Silk Road.

Curator Gauri Krishnan says that this is one of the most ambitious shows at the museum, both in the scope of the exhibition and in the quality of the artefacts, which were sourced from museums in India, Indonesia and private collectors in Singapore and abroad.

She said: "We're delighted to showcase such high-quality objects which can stand international scrutiny."

"It's not only for people interested in the religion, because it's also about art history. It's a very aesthetic experience walking through the beautiful exhibits."

A key exhibit would be four of Buddha's bone relics, excavated by the Archaeological Survey of India in 1898 from a site in Piprahwa in India, near the birthplace of Buddha. They are on loan from the National Museum of New Delhi.

The exhibits are 5cm-long pieces of bone, and Dr Krishnan said that no one is sure what part of the body they are from.

On the relics' authenticity, she said: "This is a museum artefact, an object excavated from the ground. It has archaeological evidence to support its age and authenticity."

Other rare objects include sutras and silk paintings from the grottoes in Dunhuang, a town located on the Silk Road between India and China.

Says Dr Krishnan: "These objects hardly travel out of India. This is a special chance for Singaporean audiences to catch a glimpse of them."

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> *On The Nalanda Trail* is on at the Asian Civilisations Museum, 1 Empress Place, until March 23 next year. Opening hours are 1 to 7pm on Mondays, 9am to 7pm from Tuesdays to Sundays, with extended hours to 9pm on Fridays. Admission is \$10 for adults and \$5 for students and senior citizens.

