Singapore is not known as a Buddhist destination, nor as a heritage destination. Yet in the last five years, a major new property has emerged which addresses these lacunae among Singapore’s visitor attractions. Built at enormous expense in 2007, the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple and Museum (BTRTM) was sanctioned through an understanding with the Singapore Tourism Board, in the ‘revitalised’ heart of Chinatown. Since its opening, the BTRTM has come to occupy a significant place in Singapore’s Buddhist- and tourism landscapes. The temple currently reports an annual visitor flow of approximately 600,000 people—only half of which is local. In addition to serving the local community, the BTRTM is also highly invested in its mandate to deliver value as a major Chinatown tourist attraction for overseas visitors, including Asian Buddhists and non-Asian/non-Buddhist visitors. In this presentation, I first consider the uniquely Singaporean context of the BTRTM as a landmark property for religious tourism; I then consider how the BTRTM negotiates its religious and touristic agendas within Chinatown. Finally I reflect on the possibility of the BTRTM as a new focal point for ‘Singaporean Buddhism’.

Abstract
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About the Speaker
Dr Pinkney has taught in the NUS-South Asian Studies Programme since 2008. Her forthcoming monograph, The Sacred Share: Prasāda and the Hindu Gods (under contract with Harvard University Press) draws on her primary research expertise in the classical and contemporary religious traditions of North India. Her secondary research interests include: Sikh studies, religious tourism in Asia, and contemporary Buddhism in South- and Southeast Asia.

Event Details
Wednesday, 17 April 2013
3.00pm to 4.30pm
Malay Studies Seminar Room
AS7 #04-13
Kent Ridge Campus
National University of Singapore

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