First dinosaur arrives

TWINKY has arrived in Singapore. The first of three dinosaurs bought by the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research at the National University of Singapore for $8 million, the 80-per-cent-complete baby dinosaur bones will be on display when the yet-to-be-built Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum is completed in 2014.

The two other dinosaurs – Apollo and Prince - will arrive here over the next two years.

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Dino Twinky is here

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IT SPENT one month at sea, journeying from the rugged, expansive and cold American state of Utah to the flat, small and tropical island of Singapore.

And last Wednesday night, Twinky, the baby dinosaur, arrived in its adopted land — packed in 12 crates on a 20-foot container.

But it will be a while before Singapore will unveiled the rare 12m long find at its new home, as the yet-to-be-built Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum will be ready only in two years’ time.

The 7,500 sq m purpose-built museum at the National University of Singapore (NUS) will house not just Twinky and two larger dinosaurs, but also one of the biggest collections of South-east Asian animals in the region.

For now, Twinky will wait patiently in an undisclosed temperature-controlled and secure warehouse for its star turn — and the arrival of its “parents”.

Twinky, Apollo and Prince were found buried together in a quarry in Wyoming between 2007 and 2010.

When the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research at NUS heard of the discovery last year, it made a successful bid to buy the trio for $8 million.

The museum’s team, headed by Professor Leo Tan, 67, and Professor Peter Ng, 52, went on an intense two-month fund-raising drive to buy the giant, pre-historic creatures.

They sealed the deal when Mrs Dalla Lee, wife of Lee Foundation chairman Lee Seng Gee, stepped in to top up the $2 million collected.

Prof Tan, director of special projects at the Faculty of Science dean’s office, is impatient for the arrival of Apollo and Prince.

He said: “The sooner we get them here, the better. We want them in our hands, on our soil. It belongs to the people of Singapore.”

The duo, both 24m long, are affectionately referred to by the museum as Twinky’s parents.

The trio, 80 per cent complete when found, are diplodocid sauropod dinosaurs, one of the biggest animals to walk the earth some 150 million years ago.

Apollo is expected to arrive within six months, while Prince will arrive in time for the museum’s opening.

Prof Tan said the hardest part of the legal paper chase was getting the assurance that the dinosaurs’ seller, Dinosauro International, had the right to prospect on the land leased to them by the quarry’s owner.

The NUS team also had to ensure no one else had laid claim to the bones.

The museum is embarking on another drive to raise between $5 million and $10 million to pay for professorships, fellowships and the cost of exhibitions.

As for what to do with Twinky between now and the museum’s opening in two years’ time, Prof Tan said the team is still working out plans but there is a possibility of showcasing it for fund-raising purposes.

But there will be no loan of the dinosaurs to museums. “The risk is too great. We’ll always worry, what happens if there is a fire?” said Prof Tan.

But the team is open to working with other museums on joint projects. It will also look at potential sponsors to display Twinky at private events.

“People will see him before the opening. He is just a matter of when, how and in what form.”