



TOURISM FOR A BETTER WORLD

Customer Experience Design and Strategies for Brand Positioning for CBTOs

For Community Based Tourism Organizations (CBTOs), the quality of the **customer experience** is the true product, and **brand positioning** is how you tell the world why that experience is unique and valuable. This lesson from **Kitara Foundation** provides a detailed guide on how to intentionally design outstanding experiences and use those experiences to position your CBTO as a leader in ethical, authentic travel.

1. 🧠 Designing the Customer Experience (CX)

Customer Experience (CX) is the **sum of all interactions** a traveler has with your CBTO, from their first online search to their farewell and post-trip review. Designing a great CX means controlling every step of this journey.

A. Mapping the Journey: The Five Phases

CBTOs must focus on providing consistent, authentic service across all five phases of the customer journey:

Phase	CBTO Action (Service Design)	Digital Tools (Equera's Role)
1. Dreaming/Planning	Inspire: Focus marketing visuals and stories on authentic community life and verifiable impact.	High-quality photo/video content on your listing; clear Social Responsibility Statement .
2. Booking	Assure: Provide immediate confirmation, clear pricing, and secure payment options.	Equera Platform: Instant booking confirmation; transparent price

Phase	CBTO Action (Service Design)	Digital Tools (Equera's Role)
		breakdown; secure payment gateway.
3. Pre-Arrival	Prepare: Set clear expectations regarding culture, rural amenities, and logistics.	Automated confirmation email/message with Cultural Protocol Briefing and directions.
4. Experiencing (The Core)	Delight: Deliver genuine warmth, professional reliability, and deep cultural immersion.	Trained guides/hosts (Kitara Foundation focus); simple emergency contact system.
5. Post-Departure	Engage: Thank the guest, gather feedback, and encourage advocacy.	Follow-up email with feedback form link and request for an online review.

B. Core CX Strategy: Authenticity and Reliability

- **The Authenticity Rule:** Ensure every interaction feels **genuine, not staged**. The service should reflect local customs and hospitality, focusing on human connection rather than manufactured luxury.
- **The Reliability Rule:** Despite being a rural setting, **professional reliability is non-negotiable**. This means keeping promises: if a tour is scheduled, the guide is on time; if a booking is confirmed, the room is clean and ready. Unreliability ruins the entire experience, regardless of authenticity.

2. 📖 Brand Positioning Strategies

Brand Positioning is the act of deliberately placing your CBTO's identity into the mind of the target traveler, showing them why you are different and better than other options.¹

A. Positioning Based on Impact (The Ethical Niche)

This is the strongest position for a CBTO. You position yourself as the **verified, ethical alternative** to conventional tourism.

- **The Message:** "We are the destination where your money creates the most measurable, positive impact."
- **Strategy:** Highlight the **Community Development Fund (CDF)** contributions. Use clear statistics: "When you stay here, **15% of your fee** funds the local school," contrasting with

conventional tourism's high leakage rate. This appeals to the large and growing market of **conscious travelers**.

B. Positioning Based on Authenticity and Immersion (The Experience Niche)

Position yourself as the provider of the deepest, most genuine cultural experience available.

- **The Message:** "We offer an unfiltered, hands-on opportunity to live and learn our traditions."
- **Strategy:** Emphasize the unique, participatory nature of your attractions (e.g., "Full immersion, not observation"). Showcase the hosts and elders as the experts, reinforcing the value of indigenous knowledge.

C. Positioning Against Competition (The Differentiation)

Clearly state what you *are not*. This helps the right traveler find you and sets correct expectations.

- **Action:** Explicitly state: "**We are not a luxury resort**. We offer clean, comfortable homestays, solar-powered lighting, local cuisine, and the chance to become part of our community."
- **Result:** This pushes away luxury-seekers who would be disappointed and attracts the experience-seekers who will become your strongest advocates.

3. 🛠️ Using CX Data to Strengthen Positioning

The best way to refine your brand position is to listen to your customers. Technology helps you gather and act on this data.

A. Digital Feedback and Review Analysis

- **Gather Data:** Use simple digital tools (like embedded forms or QR codes) to request feedback immediately after the stay.
- **Listen for Key Words:** Analyze the words guests use in their reviews (e.g., "authentic," "warm," "reliable," "impact," "clean"). These words should become the **core messaging of your brand positioning**. If guests consistently say your guide, Peter, is "inspiring," you position your brand around "**Inspiring Local Guides**."

B. Service Failure Recovery

A service failure (a problem) is an opportunity to strengthen your brand position.

- **Action:** If a problem occurs (e.g., water shortage), address it immediately, professionally, and apologize sincerely. **Offer a solution aligned with your brand** (e.g., "We will refund the portion of your fee that goes to the CDF this month, and you can see on our ledger that we are using emergency funds to fix the issue").
- **Result:** Handling a failure transparently reinforces your brand promise of **accountability and integrity** better than if the failure had never occurred.²

By intentionally designing an authentic and reliable customer experience and using that genuine experience to fuel a clear, honest, and impact-driven brand position, your CBTO will attract loyal, ethical travelers and ensure long-term sustainability.